OPUS

Written by

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A24
MAKEREADY
MACRO
EMAYGEE FILMWORKS

“Once at a record store in San Francisco, over a thousand kids showed up. They pushed forward and broke a window. A big piece of glass fell on top of this girl. And the girl's throat was slit. She just got slit. And I remember there was blood everywhere. **Oh God, so much blood.** And she grabbed her throat and was bleeding and everyone just ignored her. Why? Because I was there and they wanted to grab at me and get my autograph. I wonder whatever happened to that girl.”

— Michael Jackson
August, 1978

1 INT. T MAGAZINE OFFICE - MAIN CONFERENCE ROOM 1

Overhead lights fill the conference room with a notably unremarkable manila hue. The nearly two dozen seats are empty... except for one. **ARIEL ECTON, 25,** swivels semi-nervously.

She mutters the same thing over and over again.

ARIEL ECTON
The thing I find interesting about Tamra. The thing... the *thing* I find most interesting about Tamra. The thing I find most interesting...

Tight on her face we see her center herself. The calm before the storm... The clock strikes 11AM.

In floods fifteen or so editors. All are chatting with a confidence solely obtained by media-know-it-alls.

Ariel's boss, **STAN SULLIVAN, 50s,** ends the chatter. Stan is the type of guy who describes Bruce Springsteen's Broadway play as a "religious experience."

STAN SULLIVAN
OK. First things first, who should we assign the Tamra Camden profile to?

EDITOR 1
The good news is that the Quarterly's profile was flat.

EDITOR 2
As usual.

EDITOR 3
It's basically journalistic malpractice to publish a boring profile on someone like Tamra.

EDITOR 2
Agreed.

Ariel jumps in with supreme confidence.

ARIEL ECTON
The thing I find most interesting about Tamra Camden is that she doesn't pander to people in a climate where pandering is so rampant.
(MORE)

ARIEL ECTON (cont'd)
Every album, every video, every feature... she never takes the easy route to critical acclaim. The best approach with her, I think, is to push her on how she sees the current musical landscape and her previous work. Get her to let her guard down around the masterpieces and say what she loves and hates about them.

STAN SULLIVAN
That's a great point, Ariel. That's it...

Ariel smiles. It's time to seal the deal...

ARIEL ECTON
I would love to—

STAN SULLIVAN
What about Conor Heatherson to write it? He'd be great.

EDITOR 2
Agreed. I'll send him a note.

Stan nods to confirm it. The group moves on to the next item on the agenda. **Ariel is completely deflated.**

2 INT. THE RED FLAME DINER - LATER THAT DAY, LUNCH HOUR 2

Ariel somberly pokes at a bowl of vegan chili. Her godmother, poet **Nikki Giovanni,** stares at her with a mixture of concern and amusement.

NIKKI GIOVANNI
You ever wonder how the vegetables feel?

Ariel confusingly looks up from her bowl.

NIKKI GIOVANNI (cont'd)
Well considering that plant based everything is en vogue at the moment, I wonder how they feel about no one wanting vegetables to be vegetables. They have to pretend to be meatballs or lamb patties or vegan chili.

Ariel smiles. The waiter comes over to clear the dishes.

NIKKI GIOVANNI (cont'd)
Sir, can me and my *oppressed and depressed* goddaughter get a slice of New York cheesecake. Real cheese. Real cake.

The waiter leaves to fetch the slice.

ARIEL ECTON
I'm simply saying, I've been there three years. THREE. And I haven't written a single real story.

NIKKI GIOVANNI
Hey now. I loved your piece on that blind martial arts instructor. How'd he do that move again?

Nikki and Ariel hold up **three fingers** like they're about to strike each other and then laugh.

ARIEL ECTON
That doesn't count as a real story.

NIKKI GIOVANNI
Well do you have a clear path to what you want?

ARIEL ECTON
Yeah I think so. Step one: write about famous people because they're fascinating and everyone is fascinated by them. Step two: People will begin to find me fascinating. Step 3: Write about whatever I want. That's how everyone does it these days.

NIKKI GIOVANNI
And the end goal of this genius plan is...?

ARIEL ECTON
I want to write a book. Books, plural. Really take my time on something and show the world what I think. Feel. Love. Hate. But at this rate I'll be well into my 40s before that ever happens.

NIKKI GIOVANNI
(rolls eyes)
Where is that cheesecake?!

ARIEL ECTON
Godmother Nikki!

NIKKI GIOVANNI
Look... I love the confidence, kiddo. And I will give you this: your writing is fantastic. Truly. You have the gift... not just an opinion but real vision. And voice.

ARIEL ECTON
Thank you.

NIKKI GIOVANNI
But your editors are right not to give you that story.

Ariel's face drops just as the cheesecake arrives.

ARIEL ECTON
But you just said—

NIKKI GIOVANNI
I said that your writing was fantastic but that doesn't make you a fantastic writer.

ARIEL ECTON
... Ok.

NIKKI GIOVANNI
How should I put this... Maya Angelou was a prostitute before she was a poet.

ARIEL ECTON
You're suggesting I become a hooker?

NIKKI GIOVANNI
Certainly wouldn't hurt your writing.

Ariel unsuccessfully holds back a laugh.

ARIEL ECTON
With all due respect, every generation thinks they had it harder than the one after it.

NIKKI GIOVANNI
Because they did.

ARIEL ECTON
Doesn't mean it's not cliche.

NIKKI GIOVANNI
Listen, your generation is especially talented at everything... and equally as untalented at letting life and opportunity come to you. All the internships and fellowships and *whatevership* can't change the fact that you can't possibly be fascinating yet. You are all too... "on track" and abiding...

ARIEL ECTON
But plenty of people in my generation are fascinating.

NIKKI GIOVANNI
Yeah but they either grew up really poor or really rich. You were neither. You're from Oakland... but the gentrified part. You've always made good grades. Never been valedictorian. Never snuck out the house. Or smoked your parents pot. Got a good job after grad school where you're still at to this day. You are the light of my life but...

Nikki takes a bite of the cheesecake.

NIKKI GIOVANNI (cont'd)
... as far as writing is concerned, your luck is the most unlucky thing about you.

ARIEL ECTON
Well... shit.

NIKKI GIOVANNI
Well shit, indeed.

3 INT. THE RED FLAME DINER - FRONT REGISTER 3

Ariel grabs a few mints while Nikki pays the bill.

NIKKI GIOVANNI
Wait, let me get a photo of you for your mom before you head back in. That hat is so cute.

Nikki digs in her bag and grabs a disposable camera.

ARIEL ECTON
You know you could just take a picture with your phone?

NIKKI GIOVANNI
You always say that. But as I and the universe have been trying to tell you all day... there's no substitute for the real thing.

Nikki snaps a photo of Ariel.

ARIEL ECTON
Yeah yeah.

NIKKI GIOVANNI
In fact... Here. Finish the roll and send it back to me.

Nikki hands Ariel the camera.

ARIEL ECTON
Sure thing.

Nikki takes a long look at her goddaughter...

NIKKI GIOVANNI
My ever so serious writer... Let life come to you. The words—and everything else—will come after. I promise.

Nikki and Ariel hug as the hustle and bustle of New York's midtown flows around them.

4 INT. T MAGAZINE OFFICE ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS 4

Ariel steps into the elevator along side three other people. **Just as the door is shutting, AN ODD MAN steps in wearing an indigo kaftan and pearls.** He's carrying a large gift basket.

Ariel and the other people are looking toward the door, like normal. But the man in the kaftan never turns around to face the door. He is turned the opposite direction... FACING ARIEL. Ariel looks down... and then away... **The man continues to stare.**

As people exit, the man never breaks his stare. Eventually he and Ariel are the only two people on the elevator.

When Ariel's floor is reached, after an awkward delay, the man steps to the side and Ariel exits.

5 INT. T MAGAZINE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 5

As Ariel walks back into the office she quickly notices the energy is different. **Something is going on.** People are buzzing about.

Ariel walks into the conference room. Everyone is huddled over a laptop except for Stan, who is twirling in his chair.

EDITOR 1
I wonder if he's had a ton of work done on his face?

EDITOR 2
Probably. But I'm still calling bullshit on the whole thing.

ARIEL ECTON
What's going on?

EDITOR 2
There's a rumor flying around that Moretti's back.

ARIEL ECTON
Like Moretti *Moretti*?!?!

EDITOR 2
The one and only. But it's gotta be bullshit like all the other times.

EDITOR 3
Life Without Love was Tom and I's wedding song.

EDITOR 1
Life Without Love was everyone's wedding song.

EDITOR 2
Don't be a dick, Derek.

Stan has finally had enough.

STAN SULLIVAN
Are we done? Hmm? If the unemployed on Twitter want to freak out over every rumor, so be it. But you guys are supposed to be journalists.
(MORE)

STAN SULLIVAN (cont'd)
Compensated journalists. Presumably smart enough not to fall for this.

EDITOR 1
What if it's true this time, Stan?

STAN SULLIVAN
ASS out of U And Me.

Editor 1 noticeably regrets saying anything.

STAN SULLIVAN (cont'd)
No one has seen or heard from Moretti in damn near 30 years. It's not real. Besides, if there was an album I'm sure they'd announce it the same way he always did.

ARIEL ECTON
How was that?

STAN SULLIVAN
His publicist, Soledad Yusef — the only person who had an ego as big as Moretti's — mailed in a VHS of him nonsensically rattling off Moretti's career highlights, proclaiming a new album was on the way. It was nauseating. But at least you knew then it was real.

The staff members in front of the laptop shift their gaze to Stan. **Something big is on the screen.**

STAN SULLIVAN (cont'd)
What?!

Editor 1 presses play on a press release video from **SOLEDAD YUSEF, an overdressed gray haired man**. He's hyper, animated, and speaks extremely fast.

Stan walks around and looks at the computer screen. He's in disbelief.

Archival clips of Moretti are edited in throughout Soledad's address: Moretti performing in India, drinking tea with Bob Dylan, signing his star on the walk of fame, etc.

SOLEDAD YUSEF
My-loves-my-loves-my-loves-my... sweethearts...
(MORE)

SOLEDAD YUSEF (cont'd)
(deep breath)
It's been quite some time since we've done this dance but this dance that we do is a timeless one, don't ya find? A lot has changed in the last twenty-seven-years... Can you believe it's been twenty-seven-years? As you can see yours truly is now a silver fox but don't be big-boy-fooled: I haven't lost a step. But enough about me. How about him? Yes, Him. *Mr. Glam-boyant* himself. *The Velvet Caller*. *The Don Diva*. The icon responsible for the highest grossing world tour in history. The child prodigy who graduated from Julliard two years before he could legally vote. The only living artist to secure 38 number one singles. My babies YES, he's among the living and shame on you for thinking a being this divine could even do something as *pedestrian* as die. Shame on you doubters! It's with unmitigated joy that I—
(tears up)
announce that I've been tasked with the gorgeous burden of informing you that Alfred Moretti is indeed *back*. And he comes bearing a gift: The greatest album of modern times... Non-modern times... And future modern times to come. Tell a friend and an enemy... He. Has. Risen. More soon. As always, with deep connection, *Soledad Yusef.*

The room is silent...

KNOCK KNOCK. The receptionist is at the door. **He's holding a massive gift basket.**

6 INT. "NONE OF MY BUSINESS" - BURBANK STUDIOS 6

Talk show host, **CLARA ARMSTRONG, late 50s,** is in front of a studio audience taping her talk show, *None Of My Business*. Clara, sexy in a *Young & The Restless* kind of way, is the worst nightmare of any celebrity trying to keep a secret.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
...And this is her fifth marriage. Baby doll, you do know marriage isn't mandatory? You can just, ya know, hump without the ring.
(slurps tea)
One. Two. Three. Four. Five marriages. And that's five too many when you consider the men but again guys... that's **none of my business.**

(The audience says *none of my business* in unison with Clara)

CLARA ARMSTRONG (cont'd)
As everyone has been *bzzz bzzz-ing* about, I still can't believe I'm about to say this, but Alfred Moretti, *the* Alfred Moretti, polarizing musical genius turned world famous recluse, is back.

The audience gasps.

CLARA ARMSTRONG (cont'd)
And, get this, Moretti has invited yours truly and some others equally as fab to fly to an undisclosed location and be the first to hear the album he's been working on for almost three decades.

The crowd starts to cheer fanatically.

7 INT. T MAGAZINE OFFICE - CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS 7

Everyone is in the conference room gawking over Stan's invite. Flush with pride, he places the contents of the gift basket on the table for everyone to see.

Inside the basket is the official invite to the listening session, merch, organic nuts, exotic chocolate, etc. **There's a signed copy of one of Moretti's albums, *The People's Paramore.*** Ariel picks up the record and runs her finger over the gold sticker that says 60 MILLION COPIES SOLD WORLDWIDE.

EDITOR 1
I heard he sleeps 12 hours a day and stands 12 hours a day.

EDITOR 3
Like a balance of life thing. It's crazy.

EDITOR 2
The story about him having an affair with Dan Quayle's wife and being the first American on the No-Fly list...

Editor 2 does the brain explode gesture.

ARIEL ECTON
(butting in)
I heard that when Freddie Mercury passed, Moretti paid his estate for Freddie's teeth. And... well...

IMAGE FLASH: Moretti smiling with several massive out of place teeth implanted into his mouth.

The editors stare at Ariel like she's crazy.

ARIEL ECTON (cont'd)
...That's why his voice sounds so different on *Tilt* because he's wearing the teeth.

Embarrassed, Ariel grabs a green book that was in the gift basket, **THE MEDITATIONS OF LEVELTOLOGY**. The first page reads:

The closest thing to God is the artist.

There's another knock at the door. The receptionist is back with another basket.

EDITOR 1
Damn Stan how many goodies is he sending you?!

Stan smiles and walks over to take the basket.

RECEPTIONIST
This is for a... Ariel Ecton.

Everyone turns and looks at Ariel. She looks up from the book.

8 INT. ARIEL'S APARTMENT - EVENING 8

Ariel is watching the local news. A reporter is questioning people about Moretti's return.

REPORTER
What do you think of the news that Moretti's coming out of retirement?

MIDDLE AGED MAN
Music honestly hasn't been the same since he left. There's only one Moretti, ya know?

ELDERLY WOMAN
It's going to be a masterpiece.

YOUNG MOM
It feels like a dream. I listened to him as a kid. And now my kids will have their own Moretti album.

REPORTER
Why do you think he disappeared?

The person thinks for a bit.

FRATERNITY MEMBER
I dunno... But... The Debutante is back baby!!!

Ariel mutes the TV. She walks to the mirror and looks at herself. She's composed at first but eventually a massive smile melts through. She has the last golden ticket.

9 INT. SALT LAKE CITY FBO TERMINAL - THREE DAYS LATER 9

Ariel and Stan walk into the terminal at a private airstrip. Ariel is holding an overnight bag and the **Meditations of Leveltology** in her hand. It's bookmarked halfway through.

Four people wearing kaftans and pearls wait to greet them. Without asking permission, three of them whisk their luggage away. The fourth person, **JORG, 40s, remains**. Jorg's face is fatless and pale. His eyes are like lasers.

JORG
Ms. Ecton and Mr. Sullivan, welcome to Green River, Utah. It'll be an absolute honor to spend this weekend with you.

ARIEL ECTON
...thanks.

JORG
The other guests are waiting just this way.

As they walk through the space she pulls out her notebook and writes her first note: **CREEPY GREETER.**

Moretti's old tour bus takes up most of the parking lot. It's conspicuously wrapped in glitter decals that say "THE DEBUTANTE."

JORG (cont'd)
Ms. Ecton & Mr. Sullivan, please board the infamous "Louise."

STAN SULLIVAN
Holy shit. Slow Lo!

ARIEL ECTON
Why "Slow" Lo?

STAN SULLIVAN
Rumor has it that when Moretti toured his wardrobe was so heavy it would weigh the entire bus down so much they had to fuel twice as much.

Stan rushes over while Ariel hesitantly approaches. Ariel looks back at Jorg... His smile.

10 INT. TOUR BUS - CONTINUOUS 10

The bus is luxurious but dated. Corduroy is used liberally. **A small TV is playing old Moretti concerts on a loop.**

The other invited guests are sitting at a table when Ariel walks in. Stan hugs and greets them like old friends.

STAN SULLIVAN
Hey hey! Long time... Everybody. Meet Ariel. Some young blood from the magazine tagging along. This is Clara, who you know of I'm sure. And Bianca Tyson, the top Paparazza in the game.

BIANCA TYSON, 50s, nods proudly. Bianca is rugged and weathered — and dressed like a war reporter even though she's based in Brentwood and takes celeb photos for tabloids.

ARIEL ECTON
Nice to meet you guys.

STAN SULLIVAN
Clara, I see you took a break from negotiating the TV rights to some starlet's virginity to be here with us this weekend.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Fuck you too, Stan. Nice to meet you dear.

EMILY KATZ, late 20's, is in the back bedroom of the bus firing off non-stop selfies. Even from the front of the bus we could see that her Peruvian clay sleeping masks work.

STAN SULLIVAN
I'm not sure who that is.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Emily Katz, she's a social media influencer.

STAN SULLIVAN
(rolls eyes)
Lord help us.

BILL LOTTO, 50s, overdressed, exits the bathroom and heads directly for the kitchen. He pulls a tray of fruit out of the refrigerator with such comfort it's like he's in his own house. **He's wearing a fancy watch with an alligator strap.**

Ariel whispers to the group...

ARIEL ECTON
Is that Bill Lotto?

BIANCA TYSON
I know, right? You'd think some of the sheen would wear off after he pivoted to podcasts but no.

STAN SULLIVAN
I still have a few of his albums in rotation.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Well <u>I still</u> would asphyxiate him with my thighs. No question.

Bianca and Clara laugh. Clara points at Ariel's notebook.

CLARA ARMSTRONG (cont'd)
And you can quote me on that.

STAN SULLIVAN
I'm surprised he even came to be honest.

ARIEL ECTON
Why? What could be cooler than listening to "the album of the century?"

STAN SULLIVAN
Moretti and Bill hate one another. At least they used to.

ARIEL ECTON
Why?—

BIANCA TYSON
Oh shit! The Peach Set.

Everyone crowds the TV.

STAN SULLIVAN
The fucking Peach Set. I haven't seen this in a while.

The guests watch in awe while Moretti gyrates around the stage in front of a massive crowd.

ARIEL ECTON
Is this the performance at the Atlanta Olympics?

STAN SULLIVAN
Yep.

ARIEL ECTON
The one where he—

Zoom in to see Moretti sashaying around the stage wearing nothing but a Georgia peach. After titillating the audience as only Moretti can, he begins to play the xylophone.

ARIEL ECTON (cont'd)
Wow.

STAN SULLIVAN
He played 6 different instruments that night. 6!

BIANCA TYSON
My favorite part is still when he—

Jorg slithers from the passenger seat to the TV room.

JORG
Ladies and gentlemen, we're about to depart on our four hour and eight minute journey. Please feel free to luxuriate until our arrival.

BIANCA TYSON
Oooooo let's luxuriate.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Yes. Let's.

While the guests trifle through the goodies in the kitchen area, Ariel decides to walk to the back of the bus.

11 EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS 11

The bus pulls off the lot. The license plate reads: CLAP4ME

12 INT. TOUR BUS - BUS BEDROOM 12

Using her hands to help keep her balanced, Ariel treks to the back of the bus. Emily Katz is still taking selfies.

ARIEL ECTON
Hey. I'm Ariel.

EMILY KATZ
Hey, sorry I can't talk right now. *Surrender* could be any second.

Ariel smiles, amused by Emily's seriousness.

ARIEL ECTON
Um... What's... I'm sorry... Surrender?

EMILY KATZ
Our phones... Ya know where we have to surrender our phones to make sure nothing leaks and all that...

ARIEL ECTON
48 hours without a phone actually seems kinda nice to me.

Emily Katz finally makes eye contact with Ariel.

EMILY KATZ
You're not hearing me. I have possibly minutes — literal minutes — to make enough content and put it on a timer so that my feeds aren't dark the whole weekend. OK?

ARIEL ECTON
Got it. I'll let you...

Emily turns the brightness up on her ring light.

13 EXT. CENTRAL UTAH - MONTAGE 13

Skyscrapers are eventually replaced with sparse, short buildings. Those buildings are eventually replaced with sand. And more sand. And MORE SAND.

The bus passes the gas station and billboard from the opening scene...

14 INT. TOUR BUS - LATER 14

Inside the bus, things have mellowed out a bit. Bill Lotto is snoring with a neckpillow on. Stan and Clara are still watching Moretti performances.

Bianca reaches into the couch cushions and finds a Polaroid of Moretti kissing Cindy Crawford. The guests pass it around like it's the holy grail.

Ariel is reading The Meditations of Leveltology. A passage reads... **Divinity made a home in the right side of man's brain; therefore the left-brained are not only inferior but potentially harmful.**

Ariel, intrigued by the passage in the book, decides to ask Stan a question.

ARIEL ECTON
Hey Stan, have you had a chance to look at this yet?

Stan checks the book out.

STAN SULLIVAN
From the basket, right? I haven't. What's the haps?

Ariel looks at the Levelists in the front seat and lowers her voice.

ARIEL ECTON
It's, um, intense. Like this one chapter is all about—

STAN SULLIVAN
(abruptly)
Hey so this is a good time to establish our game plan.

ARIEL ECTON
Oh yeah. For sure.

STAN SULLIVAN
Great. So obviously I'll be the one who actually writes the review and piece. What I could really use your help with is some note taking.

ARIEL ECTON
Oh... I was hoping to actually—

STAN SULLIVAN
Just the note taking. Anything you see. Weird books. Orgies. Whatever. Write it down and I'll give it a look at the end of the weekend. Got it?

ARIEL ECTON
Alright...

STAN SULLIVAN
And other than that just enjoy yourself. Feels surreal, doesn't it?

Stan rushes back to the other guests looking at the TV. They're watching another Moretti performance.

15 EXT. HIGHWAY 70 - HOURS LATER 15

Desert as far as the eye can see. The windshield is now covered in slain bugs and dust. The sun is low and heavy, ready to clock out after a long day.

The tour bus approaches a large intimidating gate framing a massive property. As they approach the entrance they see dozens of people with I LOVE MORETTI signs congregated in front of it.

16 INT. TOUR BUS - CONTINUOUS 16

Curious about the gathering of people outside of the gate, Ariel leans between Jorg and the bus driver.

ARIEL ECTON
Who are they?

JORG
Moretti diehards. They've been congregating since the announcement. I even heard a few have been sleeping in their cars. All hoping to get a glimpse of Him.

ARIEL ECTON
Some people need a hobby.

The bus driver, possibly offended, glares at Ariel.

The bus pulls through the gate. **Over a hill, just hidden from the highway's eyesight, is an entire community.**

17 EXT. MORETTI'S COMPOUND - CENTRAL YARD - SUNSET 17

It's a Shangri-La in the middle of the desert... The ranch is full of perfectly preserved adobe structures. Horses poke their heads out of stables. The green foliage in the gardens sparkles, only to be out shined by the produce itself. Even the sand on the compound looks more even and pure as if it were meticulously looked after like the front lawn of the White House.

(Note: everyone at Moretti's compound will come to be known as 'Levelists')

Over 200 Levelists are wearing the same thing — indigo kaftans and pearls — and are buzzing around. Children are practicing archery. Dancers rehearse choreography. Two men carry a beautiful pot with a lemon tree in it.

Bianca points at a Moretti Statue. She jokingly bows.

A woman approaches Ariel and extends her hand. The woman's hand lingers for a bit before Ariel takes it.

The woman leads Ariel into the central building. **Ariel notices that the woman has severe scarring on her hand.**

18 EXT. MAIN HALL - CONTINUOUS 18

NAJEE EL, a tan man who carries himself like an enlightened robot, greets the guests at the door holding a basket.

NAJEE
Welcome. Please deposit your cell phones here. We will return them Sunday after your experience is over.

The guests drop their phones in the basket.

A Levelist stops Emily Katz after she drops her phone in the basket. Emily tries to step past but the Levelist steps in front of her. After a few tense seconds, Emily slowly reaches in her back pocket, pulls out a second cell phone and drops it in the basket.

NAJEE (cont'd)
Thank you.

19 INT. MAIN HALL - CONTINUOUS 19

Stan passes by Ariel while the group walks into the main hall.

STAN SULLIVAN
Be sure to write all of this up in the notes!! The fucking debutante, man!

Clara notices Ariel stewing about being sidelined.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Listen. Stan Sullivan has been a prick since the 80's. You play ball long enough and eventually he softens up.

ARIEL ECTON
Good to know, I guess.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
You're here at the most talked about spectacle on earth. Not sure how you pulled it off but you should celebrate that.

ARIEL ECTON
Thanks... Question: all of these people. Dressed in those robes and what not. It's a bit...

CLARA ARMSTRONG
A bit what? Megalomanic?

ARIEL ECTON
Well that too.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Let me tell you something I've learned from nearly 40 years in showbiz. The bigger the insecurity, the more they spend on security. The smaller the staff...
(grabs crotch)
The bigger the working staff. Catch my drift?

Ariel chuckles.

CLARA ARMSTRONG (cont'd)
(whispering)
You should see Gaga's house.

Clara smiles. Ariel smiles. They proceed on together.

20 INT. CENTRAL BUILDING - MAIN HALL 20

A massive main hall with 30-foot high ceilings. There's a welcome committee of Levelists waiting to gift the guests beautiful hand made clay vases.

The chatter stops ... **And the Levelists start rhythmically grunting in unison.** The grunting gets faster and faster until it's almost one solid humming sound... And then, from the back of the room, HE appears...

Snugly fitting into a pair of high-waisted flare pants and mauve shirt, **ALFRED MORETTI sashays into the room.** Older... <u>but still pretty</u>.

His demeanor is reserved and playful. Shrewd and sphinx-like. It has a faux shyness to it. He's always on. A consummate showman. The people's paramore.

MORETTI
For years I've thought about the first thing I'd say to everyone as I approached you all in this very room. And now that the moment is actually here it feels so very surreal. So I figured it'd be best if I started with a joke. More so for my nerves than yours. It's an original... so be kind...

Moretti clears his throat.

MORETTI (cont'd)
Over the years my concerts have attracted all kinds of *who's who*. And after every show, as customary, I invite some of them to my greenroom so we can take pictures and exchange pleasantries. Most of the time they just want to wear one of my capes to see how heavy it is. Anyway, one day both Chuck Norris AND Muhammad Ali came to the show and were backstage. As always when two alpha males enter the same space, competition ensued. At one point, Chuck Norris stood up and declared that his hands were faster than Ali's. The champ, who I adored by the way, took this on as a challenge, which it was. Chuck, very self-assured, claimed that his hands were so fast that he could chop a mosquito in half. Just as he finished the sentence, he sees a mosquito flying by and YAH!

Moretti does a quick karate chop. His jewelry clangs as he follows through. **He walks slowly toward the guests.**

MORETTI (cont'd)
I looked at the ground and sure enough there was a mosquito cut in half. Well Ali didn't skip a beat. He found a mosquito flying around and YAH YAH!!!

Ariel looks perplexed. **Moretti inches closer.**

MORETTI (cont'd)
I looked at the ground and there was a mosquito, cut up into 4 tiny pieces. Everyone in the room clapped. Chuck, determined, didn't give up. He hunts down another mosquito and YAH YAH YAHHHHHH! There lied a poor little bloodsucker in 6 tiny pieces. Ali, cool as cucumber looks for a mosquito. He sees one, locks his eyes on it and... Yah.

Moretti is so close to Ariel that he almost grazes her with his hand. He intensely locks eyes with her, eventually relaxing after a few seconds.

MORETTI (cont'd)
I looked down and the mosquito was NOT cut in half. In fact it was still flying. I said, "Um, Ali... Champ... The mosquito is still flying around." And Ali looked back at me and said, "Yeah he's flying... but he'll never have children!"

Moretti bursts into laughter. **Delayed, the Levelists laugh at Moretti's joke.** It's resounding.

The guests eventually laugh, except for Ariel. Moretti smiles and looks around, awkwardly.

MORETTI (cont'd)
Well then... Let me be the first to congratulate you on being the first to hear my 18th studio album, *Caesar's Request.*

The Levelists cheer... then the guests cheer...

MORETTI (cont'd)
Shall we eat?

21 INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT 21

Everyone gathers into the dining room to find one long table dressed with overwhelming centerpieces, handmade plating and gold cutlery.

Ariel walks behind Moretti. She makes a note of his boots — **six inch Cuban heels**... The drape of his jacket... The way his rings illuminate in the light.

Moretti sits at the head of the table. Bill Lotto sits next to him.

BILL LOTTO
Alfred!

MORETTI
Bill. Water under the bridge.

BILL LOTTO
Exactly. You look good, man.

MORETTI
You too. Not as good as me but *good*.

Bill and Moretti laugh as only old friends can.

Ariel goes to sit in the other open seat at Moretti's table...

STAN SULLIVAN
Thanks, Ariel.

Stan steals her seat. Ariel debates on saying something but decides not to. Deflated, she turns to find a new seat...

MAUDE
Hey!

In front of her stands **MAUDE, 11.** Her eyes are massive and sweet.

MAUDE (cont'd)
I heard you're from New York City. Is that true?

ARIEL ECTON
It's very true.

Maude lights up.

MAUDE
That's so cool. I like your hair.

ARIEL ECTON
Thank you. I happen to think it's cool too. What's your name?

MAUDE
Maude.

ARIEL ECTON
Nice to meet you Maude. I'm Ariel.

MAUDE
Do you want to sit with me, Ariel?

ARIEL ECTON
I'd love to.

Maude is bursting to show off her new friend.

The bus driver and Jorg are sitting across from them. **Jorg smiles at Ariel with familiarity**. Still creepy. Ariel forces a smile back.

MAUDE
Guys! This is my friend Ariel.

Ariel waves and takes a seat. As soon as she sits down, everyone in the room shushes one another.

JORG
First Roll. FIRST ROLL. Hey... First Roll.

Ariel leans over to Maude.

ARIEL ECTON
What's going on?

MAUDE
First Roll.

Moretti stands. It's silent.

A single roll on a silver plate is brought to him. Ariel looks around to see the Levelists gaze at Moretti in awe.

Moretti takes a small bite of a dinner roll and then hands it to the Levelist to his right. That Levelist takes a tiny bite and then passes it. And so forth.

It makes its way to Emily Katz, Bianca, Clara... All of them take small bites and pass it.

Eventually, the gnawed on dinner roll makes its way to Ariel.

She looks at it, only 1/4 is left. She looks up and Moretti himself is staring at her, still standing.

She takes the tiniest bite and passes the roll. **Moretti smiles.**

The dinner roll, chomped into a tiny drop of dough, makes its way back to Moretti. He finishes it. **Chatter starts back up.**

22 INT. DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER 22

Dinner is served. The spread is decadent. Steak *and* lobster. Massive shrimp. Technicolor veggies.

A Levelist attempts to pass Emily Katz a plate of steak...

EMILY KATZ
Just the vegetarian stuff for me... Thanks.

The Levelist hands Emily a plate with huge heirloom tomatoes stacked on it... Her eyes light up...

ARIEL ECTON
Um... Jorg, right?

JORG
Ariel Ecton.

Jorg turns and makes direct eye contact with Ariel—somehow getting creepier.

ARIEL ECTON
So how did you get mixed into all of this?

Jorg goes back to eating. **He's carving up a particularly rare piece of steak.** A long beat...

JORG
I used to teach music at Harden High School in Charlotte. One semester year I picked my favorite musician, the wizard of wiggle himself, to be the primary focus for the kids.

Jorg throws a slab of crimson meat into his mouth. His chewing is louder than his talking.

JORG (cont'd)
(chewing)
One day I'm teaching second period when I get a phone call saying Moretti wanted to meet me. At first I thought it was a prank, of course. No one had seen Moretti in almost ten years at that point.
(MORE)

JORG (cont'd)
So I'm like who's pranking me? Evan? Barrett? C.J.? Which one of the guys, ya know?

Jorg forks another chunk of meat. Ariel winces as he chomps down on it.

JORG (cont'd)
(chewing louder)
And then He got on the phone. And that voice is unmistakable. I was like this ain't no prank! That's the motherfucking Debutante himself.

ARIEL ECTON
So Moretti just called you and invited you here?

JORG
He told me not to tell anyone.

ARIEL ECTON
Did he tell you what he wanted?

JORG
No need! I didn't even call off from work. No call, no show. I was on a plane the next morning. And now I teach music theory to the children like little Maudey there.

Maude waves.

JORG (cont'd)
John here teaches Phys Ed like track and archery. Denise there gardens and can cook her ass off.

Denise, **40's,** a woman with short hair, nods on her way to the kitchen.

JORG (cont'd)
(prayer like)
To be alive is to be useful.

ARIEL ECTON
To be alive is useful... That's in the book right? The green one.

JORG
The Meditations of Leveltology.

ARIEL ECTON
I didn't realize it was a... that you guys are...

JORG
Levelists.

ARIEL ECTON
But it's a... What is Leveltology?

JORG
(rehearsed)
The one and only holistic path to prevent the obstruction of creativity and ensure the protection of those divinely burdened to wield it.

Ariel's at a loss for words.

The driver taps Jorg to leave. Jorg throws the last slice of meat into his mouth and they head out.

Ariel leans forward... To get a look at Moretti... At the other end of the table... Bill and Clara are googly eyed, in awe of him.

23 INT. DINING ROOM - LATER 23

The dinner is wrapping up. **As Ariel fervently writes, we pan around to see Moretti standing directly behind her, reading over her shoulder.**

MORETTI
"Sycophant" has an "o" in it.

Ariel quickly shuts her notebook and stands up.

ARIEL ECTON
Oh! Um... Hi.

Moretti's smirks like the cat who ate the canary.

MORETTI
Alfred Moretti.

He extends his hand, covered in jewels.

ARIEL ECTON
Ariel Ecton.

MORETTI
Why of course. How was your lobster? Not too buttery, I hope.

ARIEL ECTON
(surprised)
...Yeah. How'd you know I don't like butter? The whole meal was great.

MORETTI
Well we're just getting started.

ARIEL ECTON
I bet.

MORETTI
You'll have to excuse me, it is well past this old showman's bedtime.

ARIEL ECTON
Nice to meet you. And thank you again for inviting me. I'm just so honored and thrilled to be here.

MORETTI
Likewise. And don't forget that "o". Rest well.

Najee watches and waits for Moretti to leave the room.

NAJEE
Congratulations and welcome again to this once in a lifetime gathering to celebrate Alfred Moretti's 18th studio album. We have prepared a detailed itinerary for everyone so that you may make the most of this weekend.

Schedules are handed to each guest.

NAJEE (cont'd)
The nearest town is either 55 miles east or 55 miles west... Now, the terrain can be unforgiving. In the dark the cacti are invisible and can pierce through leather. We have wild bore and bison... So! We have assigned each of you a 24/7 concierge. If there are any accommodations you may desire, please don't hesitate to ask them.
(MORE)

NAJEE (cont'd)
None too big. None too small. Your concierge is here for you.

Seven Levelists split up and stand behind each guest. **BELLE, a lanky young blonde haired woman,** is assigned to Ariel and stands behind her. Ariel smiles cordially at Belle. **Belle pops a bubble with her gum.**

NAJEE (cont'd)
Can I answer any questions before we show you to your lodging?

While Bill Lotto asks if there's a masseuse on the premises... **Ariel looks around and notices that several Levelists have severe scars on their hands.** (Just like the woman earlier.) Ariel is focused on one particularly gnarly scar when...

CLARA ARMSTRONG
AHHHHHHHHHH!

Clara screams at the top of her register. It terrifies Bill Lotto and Stan, who are standing next to her. **The Levelists behind her doesn't flinch.**

CLARA ARMSTRONG (cont'd)
THE RHINESTONE CHALET.

Clara is actually *thrilled*. She is looking at the itinerary and notices that scheduled for tomorrow is a tour of the **Rhinestone Chalet**.

BIANCA TYSON
No way.

The guests all celebrate.

STAN SULLIVAN
Can't believe it's actually real.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Believe it baby!!!

ARIEL ECTON
(whispering)
What's the Rhinestone Chalet?

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Like 20 years ago Moretti's childhood home disappeared in the middle of the night.
(MORE)

CLARA ARMSTRONG (cont'd)
It was never confirmed but everyone in the industry knew it could only be used for one purpose.

BIANCA TYSON
The fucking Rhinestone Chalet...

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Moretti's fully immersive museum.

STAN SULLIVAN
Every cape. Every taped rare performance. The secrets. The scandals. It's where all the bodies are buried.

ARIEL ECTON
Oh.

BIANCA TYSON
HALLELUJAH.

24 INT. ARIEL'S ROOM - NIGHT 24

Ariel settles into her plush room.

She opens her laptop case to find that her laptop has been replaced with a letter that reads: *To ensure the integrity of your experience we have checked your laptop. It will be returned to you at the completion of your visit. Thank you.*

Ariel hears a faint popping sound outside her door. Through the peephole she sees Belle sitting right outside her door, waiting, chewing her gum.

ARIEL ECTON
(to herself)
Alllright.

Ariel goes to the state of the art stereo system in her room. A note reads "PRESS PLAY FOR NEW MORETTI SINGLE." She presses play...

The song starts moody and slow... but then the beat drops. **He's still got it.** Ariel temporarily forgets the weirdness of the day and enjoys the song. Head bobbing turns into dancing...

CUT TO:

25 INT. SURVEILLANCE CENTER - CONTINUOUS 25

In an undisclosed room we see that there are hidden cameras in all of the guests' rooms. **They're all listening to the new song.** Stan bobs his head while he brushes his teeth. Clara, sans wig, slowly grinds the air. Emily is on top of her bed. Bianca dances. It's unabashedly uncoordinated.

Bill Lotto is getting a massage, **his face is mushed in the head cradle.**

26 INT. BILL LOTTO'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS 26

The ecstasy from the massage is written all over Bill's face.

BILL LOTTO
Yeah... right under the shoulder blade... Yeahhhh...

BILL'S POV: the masseuse's feet walk away. **Four unknown feet suddenly walk into the frame...** He jumps up, alarmed.

His room is full of Levelists.

BILL LOTTO (cont'd)
What... Can I help you guys?!

RACHEL MALICK, 50s, walks up to Bill and gets uncomfortably close. She begins to size up his face by smoothing his eyebrows with her thumb and stretching his cheeks.

BILL LOTTO (cont'd)
Hey... WHAT IS ALL OF THIS?

SCRAAAT! One of the Levelists abruptly pulls out a tape measure. They begin measuring Bill without his consent. His waist, the space between his eyes, his shoulders.

After getting a dozen or so measurements, Rachel and the masseuse leave. The remaining Levelists forcefully grab Bill.

BILL LOTTO (cont'd)
HEY! Get the fuck off of me. What is this?!

He struggles and fights back but he's outnumbered. They grab him by his neck and wrap his ankles.

Rachel Malick returns holding a large syringe. She slowly walks towards Bill as he struggles. She inserts the syringe into Bill's neck.

The solution begins working instantly. Bill is woozy. He makes a break for the door but falls before he can reach the doorway.

BILL'S POV: Moretti's Cuban heel boots stand inches from his face. Bill's eyes slowly close.

27 INT. ARIEL'S ROOM - NEXT MORNING 27

Ariel heads out the door, dressed for her morning jog.

She opens the door to find Belle — and it looks like she hasn't moved all night.

ARIEL ECTON
Wow! Sorry. Didn't expect to see you there.

BELLE
Good morning.

Ariel is thrown off... Belle does not move.

BELLE (cont'd)
Can I get you anything?

ARIEL ECTON
(hesitant)
No. I'm just going to go for a quick jog...

Belle still does not move. A beat.

ARIEL ECTON (cont'd)
I *can* go for a jog, right?

BELLE
Why of course.

Belle finally steps aside. Ariel smiles cordially, trying to mitigate the awkwardness.

28 EXT. LIVING QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS 28

Ariel stretches as the amber sun creeps over the dunes.

While she stretches, Ariel sees a sculptor squatting over a pottery wheel. He smiles and waves. Ariel smiles back.

She looks behind her. **Belle is just staring at her.**

Ariel starts to jog slowly. Belle starts to jog as well, keeping a perfectly even distance. Ariel stops. So does Belle. Ariel, unsure of what to do, begins jogging again. So does Belle.

Ariel picks up her speed. So does Belle.

MONTAGE

Ariel jogs past Levelists living their everyday lives, many of them engaged in some sort of creative project. Most wave or smile at Ariel as she jogs by.

- Children paint outside.
- A sculptor recreates his lover.
- A man carries a basket of oranges.
- A painter paints on a massive canvas.

29 EXT. SWIMMING POOL - LATER 29

Ariel returns to her building.

A few yards away from the entrance, she sees a Levelist painting a portrait of a man lying down by the pool... As she gets closer she sees that the person lying down is Moretti.

MORETTI
Morning!

ARIEL ECTON
Morning.

MORETTI
How are you finding everything so far? How was your jog?

ARIEL ECTON
It was good. I think. I feel bad that my "concierge" actually jogged with me. You guys are really going above and beyond on the service here.

MORETTI
I assure you she doesn't mind.

Ariel takes a hard look at Belle who is gingerly dipping her finger in the painter's paint.

ARIEL ECTON
Yeah...

Moretti sits up.

MORETTI
What'd you think of the song?

ARIEL ECTON
Oh! It was kind of euphoric. It's been a while since a song made me feel like that.

MORETTI
How did it make you feel?

ARIEL ECTON
Well... Euphoric.

MORETTI
Euphoric how?

ARIEL ECTON
Very euphoric? I dunno. I think I was more relieved than anything.

Moretti gestures for her to keep going.

ARIEL ECTON (cont'd)
I guess relieved that it was good and that you'll live up to the hype, ya know? That all of the hoopla and fanfare back home is worth it. Is that rude? I'm sorry if that's rude.

MORETTI
No I get it. People want to know if the glitter still shines.

ARIEL ECTON
Yeah.

MORETTI
Well, wait until you hear the first half of the album after breakfast. It's going to change the world.

A group of young Levelists, including Maude, walk by on the way to their pottery class. Maude gives Ariel a wave cute enough for a commercial. Ariel reciprocates.

ARIEL ECTON
So this religion you've created... Leveltology... how long ago did you create it?

MORETTI
Nooooo. No. No. You think I sat down and wrote all of that? I'm a song man, dear. It existed well before me.

ARIEL ECTON
But you're a member?

MORETTI
I am deeply committed to it, yes.

ARIEL ECTON
I heard that you called Jorg out of the blue and invited him here.

MORETTI
Ah Jorg. What a sweet, warm man.

Ariel poorly hides her skepticism.

ARIEL ECTON
Did everyone get here by you calling them out the blue like that?

MORETTI
Some. Others had a different path.

Moretti taps his lips until an idea pops into his head.

MORETTI (cont'd)
Would you like to see something?

Moretti's smile slowly stretches from one ear to the other. He starts walking away before Ariel can answer yes or no. She follows him. Belle follows her.

30 INT. YURT - MOMENTS LATER 30

The door of the yurt opens and a strong smell overwhelms Ariel. She holds her nose. Moretti's seemingly unaffected.

MORETTI
Sorry about the odor. After awhile you don't notice it. Though if you're wearing cotton it'll get into your clothes.
(MORE)

MORETTI (cont'd)
That's why I prefer tropical wools. They don't hold smells. We can have someone steam this for you though. Just say the word.

ARIEL ECTON
It's fine.

As the dust settles, they see a Levelist sitting at a small table. He's busy working on something. Purple garbage bins line the inside of the yurt.

MORETTI
This believer is in the middle of what's known as "Diving." It's something we're all called to do.

As they approach the table they see that the Levelist is shucking oysters. He never looks up at them or breaks his concentration. He's seemingly stuck in a three part cycle: 1) shuck, 2) search through the oyster, 3) toss it. **His fingers brashly squish into the oyster mucus.**

The garbage bins are full of shucked oysters. Thousands of them...

ARIEL ECTON
What is the purpose... why... what is he *diving* for?

MORETTI
Well I'm sure someone as observant as you has noticed by now that pearls are something that we value. So we search for them the old fashioned way. Before people "farmed" for pearls, in order to get one a fisherman had to go through oyster after oyster after oyster until he found one with a pearl in it.

The Levelist is steady shucking.

ARIEL ECTON
In a hundred oysters, how many pearls are there usually?

MORETTI
Maybe none. But distilling it into a chore of numbers defeats the point, don't ya think?

ARIEL ECTON
What *is* the point—

SLICE! The Levelist accidentally shucks right into his palm and yelps. He's bleeding and holding his hand. Ariel looks mortified. The Levelist grabs a bandage and haphazardly wraps it.

Without any hesitation, the Levelist goes back to shucking, seemingly not phased.

MORETTI
We should leave him to it.

They walk out.

31 EXT. YURT - CONTINUOUS 31

Ariel trails behind Moretti, thinking twice before she asks her question.

ARIEL ECTON
Sorry if I'm missing some obvious meaning here but why do you do that?

Moretti turns to Ariel and teeters his hands like scales. They're scarred like the other Levelists.

MORETTI
It's a misconception that balance means "equal." The Meditations of Leveltology teaches us better because, clearly, one pearl is more special than 100 pearl-less oysters...

ARIEL ECTON
Balance...

MORETTI
"True Balance."

Moretti continues mimicking a scale with his hands. Ariel thinks for a second...

ARIEL ECTON
Did you buy Freddie Mercury's teeth?

MORETTI
I'm sorry?

ARIEL ECTON
Never mind.

MORETTI
See you at breakfast, Ms Ecton.

Belle escorts Ariel back to her room.

32 INT. ARIEL'S ROOM - LATER 32

Ariel is finishes showering. The very second she turns the water off... KNOCK KNOCK.

Haphazardly dried off, Ariel wraps herself in a towel and answers the door.

Without speaking, **an entire team of hair and make-up people** burst into her room and set up mirrors, tables, and racks of clothing.

ARIEL ECTON
Excuse me? Hello?

Rachel Malick walks in last. She holds out her hand for Ariel to shake.

RACHEL MALICK
Yes, hello. We don't have much time.

ARIEL ECTON
Time for what? Who are you?

Rachel guides Ariel to a salon chair and hands Ariel the schedule and points to the first event: "FASHIONING."

Rachel takes a hard, close look at Ariel's face. She pulls Ariel's hair and shapes it before she addresses her team.

RACHEL MALICK
Alright. Let start with the skin.
Deep pore cleanse into *The Works*.
After that, Renaldo handle the hair.
Think Jane Birken meets Jane
Kennedy, OK? Anna lets go through
some of the chicer looks.

Rachel walks away from Ariel. The stylists start working to make Ariel beautiful. Ariel has to yell over their working to get Rachel's attention.

ARIEL ECTON
Sorry, ma'am, I didn't get your name.

RACHEL MALICK
Forgive me! It's been quite the day. I'm Rachel.

ARIEL ECTON
OK. Rachel. I'm Ariel. What is all of this? A spa treatment?

Someone is brushing Ariel's eyebrows.

RACHEL MALICK
That's a good way of looking at it. We're going to make you look your absolute best. After all, this is the event of the century.

Rachel walks back over to Ariel and they look at her reflection in the mirror.

ARIEL ECTON
Do you know if the other guests are—

RACHEL MALICK
Now now. You lean back and let us do what we do. I promise you'll look and feel like a million bucks.

33 INT. ARIEL'S ROOM - LATER 33

Ariel's just finished getting "The Works." Her skin is glowing. Her hair is put up. She's wearing a dress that fits perfectly.

RACHEL MALICK
You glow like a young Dorthy Dandrige.

Ariel checks herself out in the mirror.

ARIEL ECTON
Now now. Let's not go too far.

A beat. **Rachel gestures for the room to be cleared while Ariel is looking in the mirror.**

ARIEL ECTON (cont'd)
Wow... that was... fast.

RACHEL MALICK
Moretti calls us his Pretty Pit Crew.

ARIEL ECTON
I really look like my mom when I get all done up. It's funny how we just become our parents—

BZZZZ. Ariel turns back around to see Rachel is holding a set of small electrical clippers.

RACHEL MALICK
OK, hun. How's the lady garden?

ARIEL ECTON
What?

RACHEL MALICK
Your lady garden... Your cha cha... Your vagina. When was the last time you shaved or waxed down there?

Ariel's shocked. She suddenly notices the room is empty.

ARIEL ECTON
Um... How is that... I really don't see why...

A beat. Rachel stares.

ARIEL ECTON (cont'd)
I mean... I haven't like shaved in a while but I don't see why you'd need to know—

RACHEL MALICK
Good. That's good. Moretti requires that everyone be unshaven. But what he really means is a full, tidy bush. Emphasis on the tidy. We all do it. Even the men.

ARIEL ECTON
You're joking?

RACHEL MALICK
Cross my heart. Even the greatest musician of this generation is confused by what kind of cha cha he wants. Men... I tell ya.

ARIEL ECTON
I don't plan on showing anyone my... cha cha. Does he plan on seeing my cha cha?

RACHEL MALICK
I'm sure he doesn't. I've been working with The Debutante since before the *Crush Cream Tour.* He's had many impressive guests. Icons. People with holidays named after them. Macho football players who still have confetti on them from winning the big game. EVERYONE, no matter what, with 100% certainty, went through this process.

ARIEL ECTON
Really? They let you actually shave them just to spend time with Moretti?

RACHEL MALICK
Hey, as Moretti always says, "No one is more of a star fucker than the fucking stars."

Before Ariel can say anything else, Rachel clicks the electrical clippers back on and drops to her knees, leaving the frame.

Tiny brown hairs hit the floor.

34 EXT. LIVING QUARTERS - LATER 34

Ariel walks outside where four-wheelers, lined up perfectly like toys, wait for the guests. Stan and Clara are sharing a cigarette. **Both have been made over.** Stan's wearing a suit and shaved his stubble. Clara's fire red jacket and skirt are only out shined by her brand new hair.

ARIEL ECTON
Hey hey.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Oh honey you look gorgeous. Doesn't she, Stan?

STAN SULLIVAN
Sure.

ARIEL ECTON
You guys look great. Love your hair like that Clara.

STAN SULLIVAN
It's a wig.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
She knows it's a wig, you miserable ass. And other than them putting it on too tight, I agree that it looks fabulous.

An awkward silence...

ARIEL ECTON
Did your "concierge" stay with you the entire night?

STAN SULLIVAN
Yep.

Another long beat...

ARIEL ECTON
Did they shave you down there—

CLARA & STAN
YEP.

They all laugh and sigh.

STAN SULLIVAN
Fucking Moretti.

Emily Katz and Bianca walk out and join the group. They've also been made over.

Najee walks over.

NAJEE
Alright. Shall we head to the listening room?

Ariel looks around.

ARIEL ECTON
We're short one, aren't we?

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Oh yeah. Where is Bill?

NAJEE
Mr. Lotto opted for a longer massage session and will rejoin the group later.

BIANCA TYSON
Typical.

The group boards the four-wheelers, two per vehicle and drive off.

CUT TO:

35 INT. LISTENING ROOM - MINUTES LATER 35

The ceiling, walls and floor all match: a stark white padded sound proof quilting. The room is barren minus a quartet of massive speakers that tower over the guests who are sitting in a circle.

A Levelist comes by with a tray of milk.

LEVELIST
Glass of yak milk?

Ariel declines. The other guests take a glass. **Emily Katz doesn't notice that hers looks slightly different.**

Moretti arrives. His outfit is better described as a sculpture than actual clothing.

MORETTI
Lovers and friends... How is everyone feeling today? Don't you find this room to be quite... swaddling?

BIANCA TYSON
Only you, Moretti. Only you.

MORETTI
How's the yak's milk? It's my favorite.

The guests all smile and nod. Bianca's upper lip is soaked.

MORETTI (cont'd)
Ms. Ecton doesn't have a glass. Can someone please...

Belle hands Ariel a glass of yak's milk. Belle's face and posture make it seem rather non-optional.

MORETTI (cont'd)
A toast! This labor of love speaks for itself so I'll simply say this: humanity has been in debt since we got on this tiny rock. Every now and then, a Michelangelo will make a Sistine Chapel or a Tina Turner will make a *Proud Mary* and humanity chips away at that debt. This album, *Caesar's Request*, may not take us into the black.

Moretti looks at Ariel.

MORETTI (cont'd)
But I'll be damn if it doesn't bring us close. Cheers.

Everyone sips their milk.

MORETTI (cont'd)
LICK IT!

On cue the second song from the album plays. **It's loud.** Moving. High octane. And damn good.

36 INT. LISTENING ROOM - MONTAGE 36

We see in slow motion Moretti singing along to the first half of his album. He gyrates and thrusts. The wizard of wiggle, as they say.

Song after song, the guests stare at Moretti as if he's invented fire... and then re-invented fire... and then re-re-invented fire...

The stereo display counts up after every song.

37 INT. LISTENING ROOM - LATER 37

The counter is at song seven. Moretti is singing along to a ballad. He wipes a runaway tear gingerly from his cheek.

While everyone is on the edge of their seat... BAM! **Emily Katz collapses.**

Levelists and guests rush to help her. Moretti begrudgingly stops the song.

Emily is having trouble breathing. She's coughing deeply. Moretti looks grossed out by it.

Stan, standing over Emily, weighs in.

STAN SULLIVAN
(to Moretti)
It's probably a peanut allergy. I swear that entire generation just woke up one day with a peanut allergy.

Ariel and Clara shoot him a look.

Emily struggles to speak.

MORETTI
Maybe it's the altitude? Let's get her some fresh air. Rachel...

Rachel rushes in and tenderly escorts Emily outside.

MORETTI (cont'd)
I've had worse reviews believe it or not.

Jorg, the only one to laugh, laughs loudly.

MORETTI (cont'd)
But all jokes aside, she's in great hands. Rachel's been handling my tummy aches for nearly 25 years. So... How about we all get some fresh air and let the music decant for a bit. Shall we?

38 EXT. MORETTI'S COMPOUND - MOMENTS LATER 38

Najee is leading the guests on a tour of the compound. They're walking through an outdoor exhibition of massive oil paintings... portraits of different Levelists...

Ariel sees Clara fiddling with her wig and walks over to her.

ARIEL ECTON
Hey, you OK?

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Oh yeah. Just trying to loosen up this damn—

Clara tugs at the wig.

CLARA ARMSTRONG (cont'd)
Must be some new glue. Why does everything have to be updated and improved? I've been wearing wigs for over a century... never once has one jumped off my head. My god. Anyway, how are you?

ARIEL ECTON
I'm good. Yeah... The Levelists are fascinating, no? Have you noticed their hands? Massive scarring all of them.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
I hadn't noticed...

ARIEL ECTON
I'm going to ask Stan if I could write a secondary piece just about them for the site. I've got all these ideas flowing...

CLARA ARMSTRONG
That's my girl.

Moretti, in a completely different outfit, is driven up to the group in a four wheeler.

ARIEL ECTON
We've been here 48 hours and I swear he's worn 48 different outfits.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Fucking awesome, right?

They continue to walk.

39 EXT. GARDEN - CONTINUOUS - SUNSET 39

The tour approaches the main garden. It's massive and maze-like. A six foot wall of kelly green foliage perfectly frames it.

Plump tomatoes and squashes dangle in the walkway. Moretti plucks one and tosses it over his head. Ariel catches it.

MORETTI
I try not to toot my own horn but I was early, as usual, to the whole farm-to-table lifestyle.

Ariel taps Moretti on the shoulder.

ARIEL ECTON
Hey.

MORETTI
Ms. Ecton. You must try that tomato.

ARIEL ECTON
I will, thanks. Do you mind if I ask you a question?

MORETTI
Of course not. But make it a few questions. Some festive and then one can be... *editorial*.

Moretti says the word 'editorial' as if it tastes like battery acid.

ARIEL ECTON
Sure. Um... Why do you change clothes so often?

MORETTI
Oh that is festive. My grandmother used to call it a "bus outfit." The logic being if you got hit by a bus today, and died, what would you want to be wearing when you go to heaven.

ARIEL ECTON
That's kind of morbid.

MORETTI
It is indeed. But it taught me not to save nice shoes for nice occasions. Wanting to wear them is occasion enough.

ARIEL ECTON
Thank you for all the clothes by the way.

MORETTI
No problem. Ya never know when that bus is coming.

Moretti lets out a fake laugh.

ARIEL ECTON
I saw on the schedule that there's a "grand finale" Sunday night. What do you guys have planned?

MORETTI
Now if I told you that would ruin the surprise...

ARIEL ECTON
Can you give me a hint?

Moretti does a wiggle that equal parts slow and powerful.

ARIEL ECTON (cont'd)
I'm not sure what that means...
(a beat)
I'm still trying to get a grasp on Leveltology. Do Levelists pray to a God?

Moretti stops walking. He takes the tomato out of Ariel's hand and takes a bite.

MORETTI
God is a temporary state of being. Divinity is achievable by all but soon wears off. When I created the bridge on *Live Without Love* I was a God in that moment. Capital G... God. Just like someone or some thing, thousands of years ago, created the tomato.

ARIEL ECTON
Well, seeing as most people never create something as good as a tomato, do you think your belief is alienating?

MORETTI
It's the exact opposite. We believe that anyone can be God at any moment. So the opportunity is there... for everyone. From the boss to the lowest on the masthead.

Moretti takes another bite.

MORETTI (cont'd)
That answer sufficient?

ARIEL ECTON
Yeah that's fascinating. Thank you.

MORETTI
Another satisfied customer. How do I do it?

Moretti begins to pluck flowers from the edge of the garden.

Ariel notices that in the middle of the garden, beautifully framed by orchids, that there is a small orange hut.

ARIEL ECTON
What's in there?

Najee buts in out of nowhere.

NAJEE
That room isn't part of the tour.

ARIEL ECTON
Oh.

Ariel looks to Moretti.

MORETTI
Najee is the real boss here. I just do what I'm told.

Najee ushers her to keep walking.

40 EXT. MORETTI'S COMPOUND - CONTINUOUS 40

The group walks into the recreational part of the compound. Kids are practicing archery with straw targets. An instructor works a teenager's backhand on the tennis court.

Ariel pulls Stan aside.

ARIEL ECTON
Hey Stan.

STAN SULLIVAN
Hey.

ARIEL ECTON
So I know you're writing our main story.

STAN SULLIVAN
How are the notes coming?

ARIEL ECTON
Good. Yeah. I got some good stuff. But I was hoping that I could write a secondary piece.

STAN SULLIVAN
A secondary piece?

ARIEL ECTON
Yeah... Leveltology is clearly a cult or damn near one. The members' backstories alone could be a piece. I'd love to take a deep dive into—

STAN SULLIVAN
Let me stop you there. We're publishing one story. That I will be writing. Somehow you've been *lucky* enough to contribute to. But any and everything that is interesting about this place will be in my story. Plus the weird groupies in robes, the vases, the fucking tomatoes... none of that matters because it's about the music. *That's* the story. The—

GLUCK! An arrow is shot right into Stan's shoulder. Shock slowly brews into panic. Blood slowly oozes out.

ARIEL ECTON
Oh my god!

BIANCA TYSON
OH MY GOD.

Levelists and guests rush over.

NAJEE
(to a Levelist)
Have Charlan rush here. Now!

Stan grunts in agonizing pain. Ariel tries to take the arrow out but the second she touches it Stan lets out an even louder yelp.

Moretti steps in but the sight of blood quickly makes him regret that decision.

Outside of the huddle, we see John and a small boy named ELLINGTON casually walk over. **John taps the small boy on the shoulder, prompting him to get everyone's attention.**

ELLINGTON
Sorry mister... I made a mistake with my grip... It slipped.

John's face is emotionless.

41 INT. CENTRAL BUILDING - MAIN HALL - EVENING 41

Ariel walks into the main hall. There's another elaborate feast on the table. Clara and Bianca are chummy over a glass of wine. Stan, with his shoulder bandaged, enjoys attention usually reserved for wounded veterans.

Ariel approaches Rachel Malick who is fixing a plate.

ARIEL ECTON
Hey! How's Emily feeling?

RACHEL MALICK
Much, MUCH, better. She actually asked me to make her a plate of food now...

Ariel see Rachel put a pork chop on the plate...

RACHEL MALICK (cont'd)
Can I get you anything?

ARIEL ECTON
No... thank you...

Moretti throws open the doors. Unprompted, he engages in a battle cry with the Levelists. The group of Levelists respond with sad groans and then happy cheers after each line.

MORETTI
The crowd is very upset...
(Awwww)
Upset that I'm not on stage!
(Yayyy)
The back row is half asleep...
(Awwww)
But the front row's ready to rage!
(Yayyy)
The drummer's an hour late...
(Awwww)
He was in the back of a groupie's car!
(MORE)

MORETTI (cont'd)
(Yayyy)
The spotlight just blew out...
(Awwww)
But my glitter shines from afar!
(Yayyy)
The price of the ticket was low...
(Awwww)
But we're booked for another gig!
(Yayyy)
The microphone is cheap and tiny...
(Awwww)
But it makes my bulge look big!
(Yaaaayyyyyy!!!!!)

Moretti giggles and gyrates as the Levelists celebrate and cheer.

Ariel notices that one of the Levelists is wearing Bill Lotto's watch.

42 INT. DINING ROOM - LATER 42

Ariel is silent at dinner. People joke and talk around her but she's pensive. **Something is wrong.**

43 INT. ARIEL'S ROOM - HOURS LATER 43

Ariel sits on the edge of her bed. Her foot taps, anxiously.

She decides to head down the hall. When she opens the door Belle is there, of course.

ARIEL ECTON
I need to talk to Clara. Can you take me to her room?

Belle doesn't move. Standoff...

ARIEL ECTON (cont'd)
I ran out of tampons and she said she had extra.

Still nothing from Belle.

ARIEL ECTON (cont'd)
Unless you have one I could have?

Belle rolls her eyes before she shows Ariel the way.

44 INT. LIVING QUARTERS - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS 44

Ariel follows Belle down the hall to Clara's room.

Outside of Clara's door there are three Levelists, the other guests' concierges, camped out.

Belle bangs on the door aggressively.

Clara eventually answers. She has a martini in her hand—not her first of the evening. Stan and Bianca are also in her room.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Ariel! Come in. Get a drink.

Clara slams the door in Belle's face.

45 INT. CLARA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS 45

Stan looks guilty-ish.

STAN SULLIVAN
Ariel! We were just saying we should call over to your room and invite you over.

BIANCA TYSON
Just saying that.

ARIEL ECTON
It's fine.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
We don't have much left kiddo. But you look like a lightweight, anyway.

Clara hands Ariel a drink. Ariel sets it down immediately. Ariel and Clara lock eyes. **Clara can see Ariel is upset.**

BIANCA TYSON
I remember when I used to look like a lightweight.

STAN SULLIVAN
Yeah, we all remember the 80's, Bianca.

BIANCA TYSON
Oh fuck you.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Guys, hush! Ariel what's wrong?

Clara fiddles with her wig. Ariel's emotions bubble up.

ARIEL ECTON
I'm not sure how to... I...

STAN SULLIVAN
(tipsy)
This better not be about the fucking article, I know that.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Damnnit Stan. Can't you see she's shaken up about something?

Clara gets Ariel to sit down. Ariel takes a deep breath.

ARIEL ECTON
I think something really, really bad is going on here. And that we should leave... right now.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
What? What do you mean, honey?

ARIEL ECTON
None of this seems off to you? Like really off? That's a fucking cult out there. They're worshiping him like he's their god or something. I saw a man slice right through his hand and just ignore it.

STAN SULLIVAN
Weird religions are par for the course with rock stars, rookie.

BIANCA TYSON
Plus, there are less handsome gods than Alfred Moretti. Amen? Amen.

Stan raises his glass.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Ariel, what do you think is happening?

Ariel thinks for a bit.

STAN SULLIVAN
Well?! Spit it out.

ARIEL ECTON
I don't know! I don't know. But is it possible that wasn't an accident.

Ariel looks at Stan's shoulder.

STAN SULLIVAN
Oh come on... You really think that little... racially ambiguous kid has a vendetta against my shoulder?

ARIEL ECTON
Put aside what I think or what you think. We know that they took our phones and we're in the middle of nowhere... that people have been following us since we got here... we haven't seen Emily since she was taken away this morning or Bill since yesterday. And... I saw one of them wearing Bill Lotto's watch today.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
What?!

STAN SULLIVAN
You sure you haven't been drinking with us?

ARIEL ECTON
It sounds crazy but I know it was the same watch. That's not alarming to you?

STAN SULLIVAN
It's less odd to me, that Bill Lotto's pretentious ass thinks he's too good to listen to the album with the rest of us, than it is that <u>the</u> Alfred Moretti did all of this to steal a man's watch.

ARIEL ECTON
You said they hated each other.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
They hated each other over something silly. Bill made fun of Moretti in an interview because Moretti stuffed his doberman after it died.

BIANCA TYSON
Ahhh Tucker. RIP.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Everyone on earth thought it was kind of strange... because it's kind of strange.

ARIEL ECTON
I'm telling you something bad is happening here. We should leave.

BIANCA TYSON
And miss the Chalet?!?!

Clara pulls Ariel to the side.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
We have one more day. You and I will stay close tomorrow. We'll hear the second half of the album. And then we'll leave together. How's that?

Ariel storms out of the room.

46 INT. ARIEL'S ROOM - NEXT MORNING 46

Ariel's eyes are open before her alarm even goes off. She's already dressed for her jog.

She tucks the disposable camera Nikki Giovanni gave her into her jogging pants. She's got a plan.

47 INT. LIVING QUARTERS - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER 47

Ariel throws opens the door to her room and pushes past Belle without saying anything. **Belle hurries after her.**

48 EXT. LIVING QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS 48

Ariel doesn't stretch. **The second her feet touch the sand, she takes off running. Belle follows.**

Ariel opens up... much faster than the day before... Belle's stride isn't nearly as graceful as Ariel's but she's keeping up...

49 EXT. MORETTI'S COMPOUND - WEST LAWN - CONTINUOUS 49

Ariel runs through a circle of Levelists doing morning Yoga. Belle follows.

BELLE
Hey! Slow down. HEY!

Ariel ignores Belle.

50 EXT. SWIMMING POOL - CONTINUOUS 50

Ariel runs around the swimming pool, leap frogging a sun bathing Levelist. **Belle follows.**

51 EXT. MORETTI'S COMPOUND - MAIN GATE - CONTINUOUS 51

Ariel runs all the way to the main gate. **When Ariel is a few dozen yards away, Belle removes an oyster shucker from her pocket.** The handle is distressed. The blade, sharp.

As Ariel approaches the gate she instantly makes a u-turn and heads back towards the compound.

Belle stops... Ariel sprints right past her. Belle takes a deep breath before running after her.

52 EXT. GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER 52

Ariel gets to the garden and dips into the sunflowers. **Belle loses her.**

Belle frantically looks, kicking down sunflower stalks and swinging her limbs. Ariel is nowhere to be found... Belle runs back toward the main house.

Once Belle is far enough away, Ariel jogs the other direction.

53 EXT. YURT - MOMENTS LATER 53

Ariel crouches behind the yurt to avoid being seen by a group of Levelists walking by... When it's clear she heads inside.

54 INT. YURT - CONTINUOUS 54

Ariel takes out the camera... **But the yurt is empty.** The tubs of oysters... the table... the bins... Everything is gone. Ariel's shocked.

After looking around she notices that there's a faint blood stain on the ground from when the Levelist cut his hand the day before. **She takes a photo of it.**

55 EXT. YURT - CONTINUOUS 55

Ariel closes the door of the yurt. There's no sign of Belle.

She sees several Levelists walk into a chapel a few hundred yards away. She sneaks that direction after taking a photo.

56 EXT. CHAPEL - MOMENTS LATER 56

Ariel creeps outside the chapel and kneels down below an open window.

57 INT. CHAPEL - CONTINUOUS 57

The chapel is full of Levelists. Najee is standing in front addressing everyone. He's not preaching, per se. But it's obvious that he's willing to stand on his words.

NAJEE
Charlie Brown once said that goodbyes make my throat hurt... But I don't think that's what I'm feeling right now that tonight has finally come. There's excitement... and pain... And above all I think there's comfort. Comfort in knowing what we've built here. Comfort in our on going mission. Comfort in our leader...

Ariel pokes her head up and sees Moretti sitting in the front row.

NAJEE (cont'd)
I have no clue what it's going to be like on the other side of the sand... But heaven, for me, was right here with you all. I love you dearly.

Everyone cheers and begins to hug each other.

58 EXT. CHAPEL - CONTINUOUS 58

Ariel discreetly raises up to take a photo but right... before... she... takes... it... **She drops down...** remembering the flash is on.

Ariel turns the flash off and then discreetly takes a few photos of everyone hugging.

She looks down at the camera. **Three photos remain.**

Ariel sneaks away from the chapel, heading towards the guests living quarters... but she sees the orange hut that Najee told her wasn't part of the tour. After debating it for a bit... **She heads towards the hut.**

59 INT. THE ORANGE HUT - CONTINUOUS 59

When Ariel opens the door of the hut she's greeted by flies.

Buckets of intestines and body fat are at her feet. Vertebra and other small bones are scattered on the table. Pelts are stacked in a corner. An array of sharp tools, some rusted and blood stained, hang on the wall.

Ariel looks to the left... SUPPRESSED SCREAM. A stuffed two-headed deer is hung on the wall. She can't take her eyes off of it. The freakish taxidermy stares back.

It takes her a second to recalibrate but she eventually begins taking photos of everything when... **SNATCH. Belle snatches Ariel out of the hut.**

60 EXT. THE ORANGE HUT - CONTINUOUS 60

Moretti, Najee and others hustle over from the garden to find Ariel on the ground...

NAJEE
Ms. Ecton, are you OK?

Najee tries to help her up. Ariel pushes him away.

ARIEL ECTON
NO! NO! Don't touch me. I'm leaving.

Ariel runs back towards the living quarters.

61 INT. ARIEL'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER 61

Furiously throwing her clothes in her bag, Ariel storms out without bothering to close the door.

62 EXT. LIVING QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS 62

Ariel walks out of the building to see everyone waiting for her... Moretti stands with his arm around Maude's shoulder... Najee and Rachel Malick and a dozen other of Levelists stand and stare.

Ariel looks back at the living quarters and sees Clara and Stan looking at her through the window.

MORETTI
Ariel...

Moretti steps to Ariel.

ARIEL ECTON
I'm leaving. I need to leave.

MORETTI
What's wrong? Did something happen?

ARIEL ECTON
Where is Bill Lotto?!

Moretti looks around, unassuming.

MORETTI
Najee?

NAJEE
I would assume he's getting dressed for dinner.

MORETTI
Did Bill do something to you?

ARIEL ECTON
What? No. Where is Emily Katz?!

NAJEE
I just left her. She's feeling much better and will join us at the children's show.

Moretti steps to Ariel, concerned.

MORETTI
Ariel. Tell me. What exactly happened? You seemed just peachy yesterday.

ARIEL ECTON
I just want to leave. I need to leave. Right now.

NAJEE
I'm sorry but that simply isn't possible right now. A few believers took The Louise into town. But they should be back soon.

ARIEL ECTON
What about one of those?

Ariel points to the fourwheelers.

NAJEE
They'll get you ten miles, max. You'd have to walk the other forty.

Najee reaches for Ariel's suitcase...

ARIEL ECTON
NO! I saw... I saw blood. And guts. I saw it.

NAJEE
That's our taxidermy workshop. Yeah you shouldn't have been in there. The fumes are dangerous—

MORETTI
Enough! Look at her. She's terrified. Obviously something we did or didn't do was wrong. And for that I'm sorry. I will personally make sure you leave as soon as possible.

NAJEE
But sir—

MORETTI
Najee, when will the bus be back?

NAJEE
Twenty minutes, max. I'll call them now.

MORETTI
OK. As soon it's back, have Ariel taken to the airport IMMEDIATELY. Have Jeff and whoever is working the plane fueled up and ready when she gets there. Top priority. No arguing.

NAJEE
Yes sir.

Ariel's moderately relieved but still cagey.

ARIEL ECTON
Thank you.

Maude's sweet face steps forward.

MAUDE
What about the puppet show?

MORETTI
She's going to miss it Maudey.

Maude's eyes tear up.

MAUDE
(to Ariel)
But... we worked so hard. And you were going to sit next to me. It's not fair.

Before Maude throws a fit Moretti gets an idea...

MORETTI
Well, we could do this. The children's building is the closest to the main gate. You can literally throw a stone from one and hit the other. We could watch the show until the bus arrives and then Ariel can leave immediately.

Maude looks at Ariel like a puppy begging to be taken home from a shelter. Ariel takes a deep breath...

MAUDE
Only if you feel comfortable...

ARIEL ECTON
I can see the entrance from the window?

MORETTI
Cross my heart... Hope to die...
Stick a needle in my eye.

Moretti raises his right hand. Ariel nods her head yes.

MAUDE
YAY!!!!

Maude hugs Ariel. Ariel stares at Moretti who's hand is still raised.

63 INT. PUPPET SHOW - LATER 63

Everyone is gathered in the children's craft room. Moretti sits on a small ottoman covered in burlap in the front row.

As promised, Ariel has a clear view of the gate. Clutching her bag, she stares out the window.

Clara puts her hand on Ariel's shoulder.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
You OK, hun?

ARIEL ECTON
Yeah, I just want to leave.

The lights in the room dim and Clara takes her seat.

A young boy addresses the room. Despite the fact that he only says five words you can feel how many times he's rehearsed them.

BOY
PRESENTING... THE TRAGEDY OF
MARILYN.

Framed by a hand built puppet stage, a marionette puppet of Marilyn Monroe is dead center and spotlit. It's beautiful, shiny, and draped in tiny luxurious clothes. It's oddly lifelike.

Marilyn lights a tiny cigarette. A small amount of prop smoke comes out as she puffs. She takes a few puffs.

MARILYN MONROE
OK. I'm ready.

In swarms a dozen puppets. They're reporters, dressed in business attire... holding notebooks and old-timey cameras. **But instead of humans, they're rats.**

Some of the rats are deformed and grotesque or have pimples and buck teeth. There's an assault of harsh flashes from the tiny cameras.

A tiny microphone lowered by a clear string lands in front of Marilyn. Marilyn is shy and reserved, in a seductive and charming way. She clears her throat.

MARILYN MONROE (cont'd)
Hello.

Ariel looks out the window. No sign of the bus.

Instantly the first reporter, a rat with wide nostrils and bloodshot eyes in a double-breasted suit, aggressively asks the first question. They speak with the cadence of 1950s news reporters.

REPORTER 1
Rumor has it that you have final say over who directs your next picture. Do you think actresses are capable of making such big production decisions?

MARILYN MONROE
I'm grateful that the studio trust me to—

The second reporter, a woman rat with brown/rotten teeth, cuts her off.

REPORTER 2
You're back from your sizzling south of the boarder vacation. The photos were hot, hot, hot. Have you grown any from that experience?

Ariel looks again. **Still no bus.**

MARILYN MONROE
Well... I think having the time to really clear my head was good for me—

REPORTER 2
Has your waist grown any? Are you the same size your fans knew you to be before you left?

MARILYN MONROE
I'm very excited about starting this new picture and we'll all be ready in every way we need to be.

The mob of reporters start yelling out for Marilyn to call on them. Each rat reporter is more grotesque looking than the last.

REPORTER 3
Is there any truth to the insomnia rumors?

REPORTER 4
Does Joe handle the finances in the household?

REPORTER 5
How do you plan on not making another boondoggle like your last picture?

STILL NO BUS.

REPORTER 6
Marilyn! You stated previously that you're doubling down on your craft of being an actress but most people consider your craft being a sex symbol. Care to comment on if the two are at odds?

REPORTER 7
How's life after the miscarriage?

As the reporters call out Marilyn's name, stumbling over one another, she puts on a pair of sunglasses.

A very tight shot on the Marilyn puppet reveals a felt tear that falls from behind the sunglasses.

FLOP! All of a sudden the ottoman Moretti is sitting on starts moving.

The guests all jump and scream. Moretti, on the floor, works to collect himself.

Moretti's ottoman is pulsating and prodding. **SOMETHING INSIDE IS TRYING TO ESCAPE.**

Eventually the burlap rips. **A human hand pushes through the hole.** The person in the sack flails to get free. The guests are terrified.

After some struggling, the person clears most of the burlap sack. **It's Emily Katz but her face is distorted...**

She's in great agony. Her tongue and eyes are protruding out of her face. The veins in her tongue are massive. It's impossible to decipher where the snot ends and the tears begin.

The guests, terrified, jump out of their seats.

Moretti looks equal parts disgusted and intrigued.

Moretti holds out his pointer finger. He can't help himself. He slowly... SLOWLY... pokes Emily's bulging eye. Moretti jumps back.

MORETTI
Lord have mercy! It's like a... like a warm water balloon.

Moretti starts laughing with Najee.

MORETTI (cont'd)
I told you she'd come to in the first act. Didn't I call it, Najee? Almost took my darn boot off.

Najee nods and confirms.

MORETTI (cont'd)
Have a seat, guys.

Moretti asks nicely. The guests ignore him.

ARIEL ECTON
What is wrong with her?!

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Call someone!

STAN SULLIVAN
I'll get help.

MORETTI
HAVE A SEAT.

Moretti's smirk slowly evaporates.

GLUCK. Emily violently gags. She seems to have lost ability to stand... just rolling back and forth on the floor.

Stan runs towards the door. Two Levelists, guarding the door, stand in his way.

STAN SULLIVAN
Move... Move motherfucker! She needs—

Stan's concierge puts him in a choke hold. He pushes and shoves with the two men guarding the door.

The Levelists forcefully restrain the other guests as they struggle to get up and leave.

Emily Katz flops over. She's really struggling to breath. Her tongue is enlarged and pressing against her teeth. Her eyes are slowly expanding.

MORETTI
Shhhhhhhhh.

Moretti smiles as he hushes everyone. He kneels over Emily.

ARIEL ECTON
What did you do to her?

Moretti looks at Ariel.

MORETTI
I promised I'd be an open book and I don't Welsh. It was explained to me that the chemical compound, when ingested... molecules... blah blah blah. I'm not entirely sure myself. Basically all the wet things inside of her are rapidly expanding. Is that accurate more or less?

NAJEE
More or less.

MORETTI
Oh. Nice. Good for me.

Emily, looking like she may burst, starts to jerk and twist. The guests cry out. Foam from her mouth bubbles out...

Stan looks at Ariel as if to telepathically say *holy shit you were right...*

Emily's tongue begins to crack her teeth.

MORETTI (cont'd)
Najee, be a dear and grab a towel.

Najee walks over and hands Moretti a towel.

Moretti takes the towel and briefly hovers over Emily Katz's soaked face... but he uses the towel to tend to his own forehead. He pats it delicately and precisely.

MORETTI (cont'd)
Why is waterproof foundation never truly waterproof?

PAT. PAT. Moretti hands the towel back to Najee.

Stan slips his hands through the grip restraint. Levelists struggle with him... shoving... hitting... **Stan is thrown into a window and shatters the glass.** With suddenly less fight in him, they get Stan back in his seat.

Clara's hysterical and attempts to run for the door. Her concierge, a massive bodybuilder type, grabs her by the wig. **As he pulls her back to her seat, her wig slowly peels off the top layer of her scalp.**

MORETTI (cont'd)
That's a little dramatic.

Moretti fiddles with his jacket while the guests sit.

MORETTI (cont'd)
Now a lot of people have worked so very hard on this once in a lifetime experience and, frankly, you all are being rude.

Bianca looks down at a piece of glass by her foot.

STAN SULLIVAN
What the fuck is this!?

MORETTI
Ew! The first question of my first interview in almost thirty years is *What is this?* Bummerrrr.

We see Belle notice Bianca Tyson inching towards the glass by her foot. **Belle discreetly removes a sharp oyster shucker from her pocket.**

MORETTI (cont'd)
(mocking)
Here, I'll help. *Alfred Moretti, why did you name your new masterpiece Caesar's Request?* Well, thank you for that question.
(MORE)

MORETTI (cont'd)
One day, while summering in the Cape, I was reading this just fascinating story about the time Julius Caesar was kidnapped. *The Julius Caesar.* Do any of you know who kidnapped him?

Moretti dramatically looks around at the guests.

ARIEL ECTON
...pirates.

Moretti steps over Emily Katz's body and gets close to Ariel. **He's inches from Ariel's face.** Ariel tries to back up but Belle, standing behind her, forces her forward.

MORETTI
From the mouths of babes... That's absolutely right, Ariel Ecton. Pirates.

Clara is bleeding from her forehead rather severely. Moretti gestures for someone to silence Clara's crying so he can focus on Ariel.

Moretti stares at Ariel, still inches from her face, and tilts his head slowly. The moment lasts for a bit.

MORETTI (cont'd)
Piiiirates.... Now tell me, Ariel Denise Ecton, do you know what Julius Caesar did when he was freed?

ARIEL ECTON
(terrified)
He went back with his army.

MORETTI
To do what? Don't disappoint me now.

ARIEL ECTON
He went back with his army and killed all of the pirates who kidnapped him.

MORETTI
Crucified them, actually. Every single one of them. No hyperbole. No fictional myth about a man who can walk on water. Actual crucifixion. For them all. Now, teacher's pet, do you know the best part of that story?

Ariel can feel Moretti's breath in front of her and Belle's blade behind her.

MORETTI (cont'd)
The best part about Caesar's kidnapping is the thing that upset him the most wasn't that he was kidnapped at all. It was that they thought he was a commoner. AN EQUAL. Because of that "oversight" the pirates asked for the same amount of ransom for THE Julius Caesar as they would any Joe Schmoe Roman. Caesar, while in captivity, demanded that they raise his own ransom. Because royalty, even when at the mercy of peasants, is still royalty. Ain't that something?

Moretti looks down at Emily Katz. **She's taking her last breaths.** Her face is bloated and blue.

CUT TO:

64 EXT. MORETTI'S COMPOUND - CONTINUOUS 64

Outside of the compound, one of the super fans, **LEE, 30s long hair,** is scrolling through his Instagram. He refreshes for "New Posts."

At the top of his feed is a photo of Emily Katz. She's eating right out of a fondue fountain. The caption reads: **Best. Trip. Ever.**

CUT BACK TO:

The guests look terrorized. It's quiet.

MORETTI
... how about that puppet show, huh?

Moretti gestures for applause. The concierges grab the guests' wrists and force them to clap.

MORETTI (cont'd)
From the mouths of babes, I swear.

Bianca reaches for the shard of broken glass. **Belle, with animal-like quickness, steps in and stabs her with the oyster shucker.** Belle bloodthirsty and feral, stabs Bianca again. And again.

MORETTI (cont'd)
(calm)
Belle...

Belle ignores Moretti. Stab. Stab. Moretti tries again.

MORETTI (cont'd)
Belle.

Belle continues. Stab. STAB. Splat. A tiny bit of blood splatters on Moretti's boots.

All hell breaks loose.

Stan is restrained by two Levelists. He spits in their face... **causing a third Levelists to stab him in the stomach with a oyster shucker.**

Eventually Bianca's bloodied body slides off the chair.

Belle stares, demented, at the dead body. **With Belle in a trance, Ariel sneaks around the shoving and sprints out of the room.**

65 INT. CENTRAL BUILDING - HALLWAY 65

Ariel sprints down the long hallway. She makes a right into the kitchen.

66 INT. CENTRAL BUILDING - KITCHEN 66

Ariel burst into the kitchen. Four Levelists who are cooking turn around. She screams out.

ARIEL ECTON
HELP! We need help. Dial 9-1-1.

The Levelists turn back around, completely ignoring Ariel. One drops a pinch of a pepper into the steaming pot.

67 INT. MAIN HALL - CONTINUOUS 67

Ariel runs to the next room. It's the main hall where the welcome reception was. She sees two teenage Levelists practicing guitar.

ARIEL ECTON
HELP!!!

They continue strumming on their guitars, ignoring her.

As Ariel sprints towards the door she sees the basket with all of their phones.

Ariel grabs a phone out of the basket but it's covered in green paint.

She digs hoping to find one that's salvageable. None are. **She runs out of the building.**

The Levelists playing the guitar never turned their heads.

68 EXT. MAIN HALL - LATER 68

Ariel sees a group of Levelists go by on a four wheeler... she runs the opposite direction... looking for a place to hide...

69 EXT. THE RHINESTONE CHALET - MOMENTS LATER 69

Ariel darts up the stairs of a colonial style home. A sign next to the door reads: "WELCOME TO THE RHINESTONE CHALET."

70 INT. THE RHINESTONE CHALET - LIVING ROOM 70

Ariel burst through the door. Things inside the Rhinestone Chalet, Moretti's perfectly preserved 1960s childhood home, are tranquil. An awful shag carpet. The old TV set plays Moretti interviews on a loop.

Museum tags accompany certain objects. Ariel briefly stops to read the tag near a radio. It says: *March 10th 1966: At just 11-years old Alfred Moretti heard himself on the radio — this radio — for the first time.*

Ariel hustles to the kitchen.

71 INT. THE RHINESTONE CHALET - KITCHEN 71

There's a phone in the kitchen. Ariel sprints toward it and pulls it off the wall. She dials 911 and holds it to her ear. An automated message starts. **It's Moretti's voice.**

MORETTI
Welcome to the Alfred Moretti Museum... The shiniest place on earth—

Ariel drops the phone and runs to the hallway...

She has two options... go upstairs or down to the basement. **Ariel heads downstairs.**

72 INT. THE RHINESTONE CHALET - BASEMENT FLOOR 72

Ariel cautiously steps into the room and looks around for the light switch. She finds it. FLICK.

The room is bright. **In the center is a table covered with funnels and empty cyanide bottles.**

Ariel breaks one of the bottles. She picks up a big shard and heads back upstairs.

73 INT. RHINESTONE CHALET - SECOND FLOOR - HALLWAY 73

Ariel sprints up the stairs, hops over a velvet rope with a sign that reads "STAFF ONLY," and up to the second floor. **She sees two doors.**

74 INT. THE RHINESTONE CHALET - ROOM A 74

Ariel flicks on the light. **MORETTI IS STANDING THERE.** Ariel jumps.

It's actually a wax statue of Moretti, lifelike and creepy.

The room is bright white with a dozen of Moretti's iconic outfits on display. Ariel knocks the statue of Moretti over before she hustles to the next room.

75 INT. THE RHINESTONE CHALET - ROOM B 75

The next room is full of taxidermied animals. As she walks slowly through the room we see taxidermied deer, roadrunners and other animals.

On the wall, Ariel sees Bill Lotto's taxidermied head. It has a beautiful arrangement of flowers around it and a grand oak wood mount with a brass plaque. She inches closer to it to read the plaque:

"The critic has to educate the public; the artist has to educate the critic." — Oscar Wilde

CUT TO:

76 EXT. THE RHINESTONE CHALET - CONTINUOUS 76

Levelists run up the stairs and into the Chalet.

As everyone else scrambles, Belle calmly walks to the back of the house. **She looks up.**

CUT BACK TO:

77 INT. THE RHINESTONE CHALET - ROOM B 77

Ariel hears voices outside of the house. She thinks for a split second... CRACK. **Ariel breaks the window in the taxidermy room.** She wipes some of the blood from her hand on the broken window.

She then quickly darts across the hallway into the bathroom.

78 INT. THE RHINESTONE CHALET - BATHROOM 78

Ariel slowly closes the door. **It creaks.** She successfully gets the door closed and locks it. She gets in the shower and lays flat.

Outside the door Ariel hears Levelists scurrying.

The wood creaking beneath their feet gets louder and louder...

A Levelist discovers the busted window.

LEVELIST (O.C.)
Hey! She went out the window. Go!

Ariel hears them head down the hall. Minimal relief. Curled up in the shower, Ariel looks up.

From Ariel's POV we see a window to her left and the shower curtain to her right.

She grips the broken bottle tighter.

Ariel hears something. It's faint. Like tiny scratching. She leans up and moves the shower curtain to the right, so she can see the door.

As Ariel stares at the door... **BANG**. The window behind her breaks. **IT'S BELLE.** She shoves Ariel, knocking the broken bottle on the floor. Belle takes the oyster shucker and puts it against Ariel's neck.

Ariel pushes back. The curtain gets tangled as they tussle.

Belle eventually presses the oyster shucker firmly against Ariel's neck bringing the tussle to a halt. Belle slowly walks her toward the door.

79 INT. THE RHINESTONE CHALET - HALLWAY 79

Belle unlocks the door and pushes Ariel into the hallway. **Ariel hits the wall and is knocked unconscious.**

FADE OUT

80 INT. MAIN HALL - MOMENTS LATER 80

Ariel slowly comes to, focusing on the dancing flames of a lit fireplace.

Her hands and feet are tied. She's sitting next to Clara, whose hands and feet are also tied. Clara's wig hovers above her bloody scalp, almost completely removed.

Ariel notices that Clara is wearing a blue kaftan and pearls. She looks down and sees that they also dressed her like a Levelist. There's a bandage on her cut hand.

On a table between the both of them are two glasses of champagne.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
(struggling)
I knew you were tougher than you looked.

Ariel looks around. She notices that her and Clara are actually on a stage... a small wooden riser that is new to the room.

She also sees that the room itself is packed with over 100 Levelists... They're partying. Hugging and dancing... Drinking and laughing. Some look euphoric. Others crying tears of joy.

The second half of Moretti's album is playing... (Present conundrum aside it sounds really good)

CLARA ARMSTRONG (cont'd)
Back when I was a VJ, just starting out, I did a segment on Moretti.

Clara has to pause from time to time because of the pain.

CLARA ARMSTRONG (cont'd)
He was dating Madonna at the time. Everyone knew it but it wasn't confirmed. Anyway, I saw her leaving his place in The Village one morning so I had it confirmed. Well, the day after the segment aired, my dog, George, went missing. My roommate used to always leave the gate open so we just assumed he got lost.

ARIEL ECTON
Clara...

CLARA ARMSTRONG
The next year, at Glastonbury, Moretti headlined the festival. He was wearing a dog collar around his neck that looked identical to George's. He looked at me, backstage, with this shit-eating grin and deep down I knew... I just knew.

ARIEL ECTON
We need to get help.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
Honey... Help!? There's no help to be had. Emily, Stan... they're all dead. We're in the middle of fucking nowhere. But hey, at least we won't die sober.

ARIEL ECTON
I'm pretty sure the champagne is poisoned.

CLARA ARMSTRONG
What about all those over there?

Ariel looks and sees that there are several tables with glasses of champagne. **ENOUGH FOR EVERYONE.** Ariel looks back at Clara. She doesn't need to say it.

CLARA ARMSTRONG (cont'd)
(realizing)
Wow... well... I guess it wouldn't be the first mass suicide in cult history. Not really Moretti's style to be so unoriginal and yet here we are.

ARIEL ECTON
There's gotta be a way out of here.

Ariel starts working on her restraints when...

The room goes silent. **Moretti has entered.** He's wearing all white. Every few seconds light catches the glitter on his face. He looks angelic.

The Levelists part a path for him. The heels of his boots are the only sound we hear.

Ariel works harder on her restraints.

Moretti eventually gets on the stage... standing a few yards away from Ariel and Clara. Najee hands him a microphone and a glass of champagne...

MORETTI
What can I honestly say about our time in the sand that you don't already know...

Levelists begin to pass out the champagne glasses.

MORETTI (cont'd)
You can't unpaint a canvas or unplay a chord... You can only hope that if a mistake was made, whether it's yours or someone else's, that you can resolve it. Follow it up with something beautiful.

Ariel's managed to get a few of the knots loose.

MORETTI (cont'd)
I have been all over this world. I've studied at every temple of taste and picked over every reliquary that exists... And you people, <u>you</u>... you are the most beautiful gems I've ever seen...

Everyone raises their glasses except Ariel and Clara, obviously. Moretti looks over and then nods to Najee. **Najee and Belle hold champagne glasses to Clara and Ariel's lips.**

MORETTI (cont'd)
I'm not sure what's next... but may it be beautiful. Cheers.

Everyone drinks their champagne — Jorg, Warren, little Maude...

Belle tries open Ariel's mouth to force her to drink it. She's trying to pry it open when... **Ariel manages to get her hands loose.**

BANG. Ariel pushes back and knocks Belle over.

Ariel grabs the glass on the table and splashes Moretti with champagne. She takes one large leap to the fire place, reaches her hand in, and shovels lit coals at Moretti.

MORETTI'S COAT CATCHES FIRE.

Everyone tends to Moretti, attempting to put his coat out. Ariel loosens her feet restraints. SHE'S FREE.

Belle sees Ariel loose and attempts to grab her but Clara tilts her chair over trips Belle. While they're both on the ground Clara bites Belle... Hard.

Ariel turns around and takes off outside the door.

81 EXT. MAIN HALL - CONTINUOUS 81

Ariel makes a break for the four wheeler. She hops on and speeds to the compound entrance.

Belle, a massive blood stain on her leg, runs out the door just as Ariel takes off on the four wheeler. **Belle follows on foot.**

82 EXT. MORETTI'S COMPOUND - MAIN GATE - CONTINUOUS 82

Ariel jumps off the four wheeler while it's still moving and begins to scale the gate.

Belle is sprinting toward the entrance.

Ariel jumps down from the top of the gate. It's a hard fall.

There's one superfan's car left. Ariel hobbles to it and bangs on the window. Lee, sleeping inside, is startled.

BELLE IS QUICKLY APPROACHING.

ARIEL ECTON
HELP. HELP.

Ariel runs to the other side of the car and opens the passenger door.

Lee jumps out of the car. Ariel scoots over to the driver's seat and looks for the keys... Lee has them.

Ariel jumps out the car.

ARIEL ECTON (cont'd)
WE NEED TO LEAVE. NOW.

LEE
Who are you?!

ARIEL ECTON
(collecting herself)
Listen. There's been an emergency. People are dead. And we need to get help right now. Please, give me the keys.

Lee looks around trying to figure out what's going on.

LEE
You were in there?

ARIEL ECTON
YES. And we need to get the police here, right now. Please... Let's go.

LEE
Holy shit, you're bleeding. Are you hurt?

ARIEL ECTON
Yes.

LEE
Is Moretti hurt?

Belle is approaching the gate.

ARIEL ECTON
Yes. Moretti is hurt and we need to get him help.

LEE
You met Moretti?!?!

Ariel walks up to the super fan... POW. Ariel punches him in the neck with **three fingers**. He falls to his knees and drops the keys.

Belle scales the gate.

Ariel grabs the keys and jumps into the car.

Just as Belle gets over the gate... Ariel peels off...

Attached to the dashboard, the head of a Moretti bobble-head bounces about... Ariel pushes the gas down even further.

FADE OUT...

83 INT. THE WALL STREET JOURNAL OFFICE 83

SUPER: TWO YEARS LATER

Ariel is sitting across from a JOURNALIST, wrapping up an interview about her new book. Wearing a Gucci suit and heels... Ariel's poised in a way we've never seen.

On the table is a copy of the book. It's titled: "OUR TIME IN THE SAND" by Ariel Ecton. The cover of the book is a photo of Levelists walking into the chapel... (It's one of the photos from Ariel's disposable camera.)

JOURNALIST
A projection of 1.5 million sales in the first month must feel amazing. I mean... You tell me. How does that feel?

ARIEL ECTON
Honestly... yeah. It feels... amazing.

They laugh.

JOURNALIST
When it finally comes out tomorrow will you feel relief or sadness it's no longer just yours?

ARIEL ECTON
Maybe a mix of both. I'm honestly just taking it one step at a time. Right now, I'm here with you. Tomorrow I'll do the Today Show in the morning. And then get some much needed rest?

JOURNALIST
So... I gotta ask...

Ariel already knows the question.

JOURNALIST (cont'd)
That's how it *really* happened when you went back to the compound?

ARIEL ECTON
Just as I wrote it...

CUT TO:

84 EXT. MORETTI'S COMPOUND - TWO YEARS AGO - DAWN 84

Ariel is in the back of a police car. It's one police car in a fleet of many. All have their sirens blaring as they drive up the interstate. They speed up to Moretti's compound.

ARIEL ECTON
Here it is. On the right.

The gate is open.

Once they drive over the hill, right in the front courtyard, they see Moretti. He's playing the piano, alone. There are five dead bodies, covered with sheets, in front of him.

Moretti smiles while he plays. The police approach him with their guns drawn... he continues to play.

Ariel looks around... confused...

ARIEL ECTON (cont'd)
(under breath)
Where is everyone?

Moretti smiles while the officers put cuffs on him.

CUT BACK TO:

85 INT. THE WALL STREET JOURNAL OFFICE - PRESENT DAY 85

The interviewer's mind is blown even though he's already heard this story a million times.

INTERVIEWER
And he was just there... alone... playing the piano?

ARIEL ECTON
For the millionth time... YES. The cops never found a single Levelist body.
(MORE)

ARIEL ECTON (cont'd)
They still haven't been able to track down the fan outside the gate. Nothing.

INTERVIEWER
... insane...

Ariel's phone rings. **The number is unlisted.**

ARIEL ECTON
Excuse me for a moment.

Ariel walks to the corner of the room and answers the phone.

ARIEL ECTON (cont'd)
Hello? This is Ariel Ecton.

86 INT. MALIBU BEACH HOUSE 86

SOLEDAD YUSEF
My love-my dear! It's Soledad Yusef calling from sunny Malibu California. How do you find yourself on this Monday morning?

87 INTERCUT ARIEL AND SOLEDAD. 87

SOLEDAD YUSEF
Ariel? Ground control to Ariel darling... are you there?

Ariel is speechless. Soledad sounds chipper, as if nothing ever happened.

ARIEL ECTON
Yeah.

SOLEDAD YUSEF
I thought for a second the call dropped. It's funny Raul, my botanist and the nimblest Dutch man on God's green earth, thinks that all of the agave plants he put in last summer interfere with the phone reception but I can't get enough of those damn things. Makes me feel like I'm somewhere prehistoric, ya know what I mean?

ARIEL ECTON
What do you want?

SOLEDAD YUSEF
Oooo tangy. And short.. Alrighty. But it's more of what you want. As you know, you sent six interview requests to sit down with Mr. Moretti for your novel.

ARIEL ECTON
It's not a novel. Novels are fictional.

SOLEDAD YUSEF
Riiiiggghhtttt. Well he'd like to finally grant that request. Can you do this evening at six?

ARIEL ECTON
What?

SOLEDAD YUSEF
This evening. Can you clear your schedule to speak with Mr. Moretti this evening?

ARIEL ECTON (COVERING PHONE)
My book comes out tomorrow. I can't—

SOLEDAD YUSEF
Maybe you could add it for a deluxe version or use it for promotion. Some multi-digital-media-iThingy. Isn't that all the rave now?

Silence.

SOLEDAD YUSEF (cont'd)
Ariel, my love?

ARIEL ECTON
(conflicted)
Yes...

SOLEDAD YUSEF
Yes, as in you'll be there later?

ARIEL ECTON
Um... Yes.

SOLEDAD YUSEF
Oh good. Very good. Mr. Moretti is currently residing at the high risk state hospital in Reno.
(MORE)

SOLEDAD YUSEF (cont'd)
More of a medieval torture chamber if you ask me. Honestly, the whole state should be tried for keeping anyone in such conditions. Truly abhorrent.

Ariel hesitates to respond but can't help it.

ARIEL ECTON
Soledad, you do know that your client, Alfred Moretti, plead guilty to the murder of six innocent people, tried to kill me, and is suspected to have lead hundreds to a mass suicide.

Long pause.

SOLEDAD YUSEF
Ya know all the greats are passionate and none are greater than The Debutante. I, for one, have always found his passion refreshing.

Ariel is speechless.

ARIEL ECTON
OK.

SOLEDAD YUSEF
OK my dear. I won't be able to join you guys, unfortunately. I'm still working through a probation-y thing over here in the state of California.

Soledad is wearing an house arrest bracelet.

SOLEDAD YUSEF (cont'd)
But me and my agave stalks will be sending you the best energy. Ciao!

Ariel hangs up the phone, bewildered.

88 INT. CENTRAL NEVADA PSYCH WARD - SUNSET 88

Ariel is waiting in a visitation chamber. Impenetrable glass separates two phones. Her toe taps... anxious and nervous...

Moretti is brought into the other side of the talking glass.

Moretti does not look "show ready." His natural hair, finally unobstructed with, is gray and thin. The beige scrubs can't hide his gut. His reading glasses are puny and plastic.

Moretti sits down but Ariel, stunned, pauses. Moretti gestures for her to sit. **She has pity in her eyes.**

MORETTI
Salutations, as they say.

ARIEL ECTON
Sorry I just...

MORETTI
Missed me?

ARIEL ECTON
... Never seen you look so... casual.

Ariel snaps out of it.

ARIEL ECTON (cont'd)
Thank you for reaching out. I'm sure that talking about that weekend won't be easy.

Ariel notices that Moretti brought a first-bound edition of her book.

ARIEL ECTON (cont'd)
Oh! You have the book already. How'd you get—

MORETTI
The owner of your publishing house is an old fishing buddy. Hope it's OK that he was kind enough to send me an early copy.

ARIEL ECTON
Yeah. Of course. What'd ya think?

MORETTI
Scandalous.

Ariel re-positions herself in her seat.

ARIEL ECTON
Let's just jump head first into it, shall we?

Moretti gestures that he's OK with that. Ariel turns on her tape recorder. Before she can read her first question...

MORETTI
Python.

ARIEL ECTON
I'm sorry.

MORETTI
In your book. You said that my boots, the first day, were gator. But they're made of python. It's an easy mistake for an untrained eye but I would never wear gator boots after August. Ya see python scales are tighter and loftier. More chic.

Moretti slouches in his chair.

ARIEL ECTON
Actually, that's a healthy place to start. Is there anything you'd like to refute in the book?

MORETTI
Hey now... I'm not being critical of your masterpiece. I'm just saying you should have consulted someone who knows about luxury footwear before assumptions were made. **A little constructive criticism never killed anyone.**

Ariel is unsure if he's making a very morbid joke or not. **Moretti's smirk confirms it's the former.**

ARIEL ECTON
Well, if that were true Stan, Clara and everyone else would still be alive.
(beat)
I dug around, as you know from the book, and found Emily Katz's broadcast where she said *Tilt* was overrated. I found the rather unflattering vacation photos Bianca took of you... Clara's expose on your—

MORETTI
She once referred to me as "inflated and dated." Not a bad zinger if I'm being honest.

ARIEL ECTON
Do you have any remorse for the *hundreds* of people you murdered?

MORETTI
(baffled)
I didn't murder hundreds of people.

ARIEL ECTON
You didn't murder Stan Sullivan, Bianca Tyson, Emily Katz, Clara Armstrong, and Bill Lotto?

MORETTI
Oh, yeah. I murdered *them*.

Ariel, frustrated, stares at him.

ARIEL ECTON
And the Levelists?

Moretti fiddles with the lackluster hair on his head.

ARIEL ECTON (cont'd)
Where are the Levelists' bodies? The authorities spent months searching all throughout that compound and the mountains and not a single Levelist body was found, dead or alive.

MORETTI
Why are you asking me? Ask them.

Ariel is visibly very frustrated.

MORETTI (cont'd)
(realizing)
Wait! I read it in your little book but I didn't think you were serious. You really think that *I* killed them? They were my fans — my family...

ARIEL ECTON
I, and many other people, believe that you orchestrated a mass suicide. So yes. Yes I do. I was also there to see it all with my own eyes.

MORETTI
Did you actually see anyone drink poison?

Ariel thinks for a beat.

ARIEL ECTON
So what did your followers drink in the champagne glasses?

MORETTI
... Champagne.

ARIEL ECTON
Then why did you try to force Clara and I to drink it?

MORETTI
It's bad luck to have an incomplete toast, silly.

Ariel is growing more and more frustrated.

ARIEL ECTON
Bullshit! Why not just tell us... you're doing a life sentence six times over... Where are the Levelists right now?

MORETTI
Um... around?

CUT TO:

89 INT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS 89

We see different Levelists wearing normal clothes and living normal lives all over the world.

- Jorg is teaching in a grade school
- Najee, wearing a name tag that says Kevin, is working at Foot Locker
- Maude is in Time Square with her family
- The super fan, Lee, is directing traffic
- Belle is bagging groceries. She gives a rude customer the same look she gave Bianca before she killed her

CUT BACK TO:

90 INT. SALT LAKE CITY PSYCH WARD 90

Ariel's fed up.

ARIEL ECTON
Never mind. I came here to try and offer closure to the families of those that you grotesquely murdered.

MORETTI
And to sell more books.

ARIEL ECTON
That seems like a flimsy highroad for you to take considering you're the one wearing the cheap jumpsuit.

A beat. Moretti looks genuinely, deeply hurt.

MORETTI
The jumpsuit dig was a low blow. I feel like we got off track. Why don't you ask me *the* question you came here to ask me.

ARIEL ECTON
You seem to know what that question is so why don't you just answer it.

MORETTI
Well while you circle around it, let me talk you through something. Primitive man... neanderthals... they chose a leader like animals. Whoever was the strongest got to lead. If you wanted to change that, you'd *physically* challenge them and whoever won is who got to call the shots.

ARIEL ECTON
What does this have to do with you killing six people?

Moretti's face is uncharacteristically serious.

MORETTI
Man evolved. We created government and rules. And our criteria for what makes a good leader changed. Instead of this...
(points to bicep)
Now we value this...
(MORE)

MORETTI (cont'd)
(points to head)
That's why presidents go to Ivy League schools and get law degrees. These are signals, in our society, be they flawed or not, that someone is smart.

Moretti looks at the clock. He's running out of time.

MORETTI (cont'd)
But look at where that logic has gotten us? We've destroyed the planet, less people are literate now than they were 30 years ago, we hate one another and the list goes on. That metric of what would make a good leader failed us. But there's an answer. The next evolution. Leadership isn't proven by this...
(points at bicep)
...or this...
(points to brain)
...but by this...
(points to his heart)
Imagine a world where the most creative, sensitive, thoughtful people were in charge. Where we valued talent over power. Where a women's diplomacy is considered a strength and not a weakness. Where novelists who create utopias on the page will create the actual world we're living in. Picture that... That is what Leveltology is fighting for.

ARIEL ECTON
You're not fighting for anything. You're in jail.

MORETTI
You wrote what people are saying will be the book of the century. I hear you may sell over two million copies in the first week. This masterpiece, your masterpiece, is the introduction to our story.

ARIEL ECTON
But... Leveltology and you... all of you come off as—

MORETTI
Come off as what?! Crazy?

ARIEL ECTON
Evil.

MORETTI
Are you sure?

Moretti quickly flips through Ariel's book.

MORETTI (cont'd)
Page 45. "Clara made her career jabbing at the famous — Moretti being a particular obsession of hers. She poked and poked at him for decades."

Moretti flips to a different page.

MORETTI (cont'd)
"The community did seem to achieve harmony, a pillar for their belief. You could overhear the students practicing instruments or walk in on a painter mid-breakthrough." Page 70.

ARIEL ECTON
But immediately after that I talk about how all of that changed.

Moretti flips to a different page again.

MORETTI
Page 100. "After finishing the Meditations of Leveltology I couldn't help but hope that such a pure and good idea, a world revolving around artists, was implanted into the heart and mind of a saner, less cruel man." You wrote this as I knew you could.

The guard comes in to get him. Moretti raises his hand as if to ask for a few more seconds.

MORETTI (cont'd)
Tomorrow, amplified by every media outlet on earth, you're going to publish the greatest piece of propaganda for a belief since that long haired fella turned water into wine. And I called you here, today, to say thank you.

ARIEL ECTON
But no one will condone murder.

MORETTI
Maybe not immediately. But eventually? No one stops being Catholic when they read about the crusades, right? *Caesar's Request* charted at number one. It's *still* on the charts. Not to mention as long as the most influential people in this world are artists, Leveltology will grow. And I have A LOT of fishing buddies. You'd be surprised. We just needed something to jump start the conversation.

Moretti holds up the book.

ARIEL ECTON
This won't work.

MORETTI
It already has.
(beat)
Whelp, I have to run which means we're out of a time so ask me <u>the</u> question you came here to ask.

A beat.

ARIEL ECTON
I never wrote about you. I've never publicly said anything about you. So... Why did you choose me?

MORETTI
BINGO. Well, two reasons really. You were a pure vessel... Uncorrupted by success or cheap shots for clicks. So that and... you know that piece you wrote about that school board lady?

ARIEL ECTON
Carol Reggo? The school dean who retired? It was like 500 words.

MORETTI
Yeah! Her. I thought it was sweet how you described her eyebrows. "Too beautiful to be identical." I wanted my eyebrows in good hands.

Time's up. Ariel throws the phone down and stands up. The guard tries to calm her down but she jumps away from him. Moretti does one last wiggle as she storms away.

91 INT. GOOD MORNING AMERICA SHOW - NEXT DAY 91

Ariel is backstage about to be interviewed. A MAKEUP ARTIST stands next to her looking at her phone. She gets Ariel's attention...

ARIEL ECTON
What's up?

MAKEUP ARTIST
Your book is trending worldwide.

When Ariel looks at the list of things trending, *Our Time In The Sand* is at the top. **The fourth entry is #Leveltology.**

A PA walks Ariel to her chair in the middle of the set.

While the producers count down... **Ariel notices that the Good Morning America host is wearing a pearl necklace, tucked into her shirt, that's identical to the ones the Levelists wore.**

Ariel freezes. The lights cut on. The cameras start rolling.

GMA HOST
We're joined today by the one and only Ariel Ecton. Her debut book came out this morning — but unless you're living on Mars you already know that. Ms. Ecton, how does it feel to write the book everyone is talking about?

Ariel is speechless.

THE END